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The last ditch.



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# *The Last Ditch*

by

VIOLET HUNT

Author of

"*Their Lives*," "*The House of Many Mirrors*"  
"*The Celebrity's Daughter*," etc.

"*Affavit Deus . . .*"



L O N D O N  
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TO  
VALERIE VIOLET MARLEY





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*PART I*



## INTRODUCTION

ON this twenty-fourth of August, 1915, I, Laura Quinney, born and bred a British subject, am almost surprised to find myself sitting high and dry, without a scar or recollection of one, out here on the piazza of our house at Newport, R.I., watching American citizens of both sexes taking their summer pleasure, while over there, across the seas, the old world that I sprung from agonizes.

Young men of fighting age in flannel and bathing suits, go in no fear of being forced to doff them for khaki; girls dressed up, like myself, to the very nines of expensive simplicity, walk about with sticks and help these active young men to do nothing.

This very expensive simplicity I say, with irony, we opulent Americans can the more easily afford, since it is paid for, more or less, by the vast indebtedness which old England is running up with us for the prosecution of her War of Regeneration—her war to end war! Poor dear!

Here, where everything is on such a large scale that it makes us cynical and fearless, unappalled, unexcited by dangers, fortunes, and krachs and splashes, it seems absurd and pathetic to think of that small house over there, overfurnished with curios—that queer, courageous, unbusinesslike bit of all-right, defying militarism, pretending to have a mission to maintain the balance of the Continent, holding up old Europe on the palm of its brave little hand, like Atlas in the advertisement of the Insurance Companies. I am, I suppose, absurdly proud of my old country, although ever so long ago I made myself, by marrying, into an American. My sympathies should be utterly American, my husband says. So they are. But all the same, it drags at my heart-strings to think that, three thousand miles away, my mother and sisters are wallowing in that civilian slough, living from day to day on short commons and insufficient news, with nothing in the world to do but make swabs and sit still

to be taxed. Their job is to keep quiet and foot the bill that keeps all the male folk they love on the other side of the Channel, amid the booming of guns and showers of shrapnel, in fullest life, nighest to death.

My people have nobody actually out there, that's one comfort, since my brother died of consumption five years ago. It must be a comfort to Mamma to think that Romanille got himself out of it neatly, before the trouble, and that poor dear Papa at the break-out of the war was already over age—seventy-five—and has any way done his bit in diplomacy with credit. He was Ambassador to three Courts. They do say that it is faulty diplomacy which has brought on this war—that it might, if people had listened to Sasonof, have been averted. Diplomats won't trust each other.

I know well, of course, that as a nation our sympathies are bound to be with England, the home of our language, the warden of our ancient playground, the custodian of our rococo pleasure-house. Why, just think! If the Allies fail there'll be no "Parus" for us, no Vichy or Contrexéville, no *brocanteurs*, no museum, not an antique left for our millionaires to buy and bring over here. That is all England is to us, really, a clearing house of *objets d'art* and a nursery of pleasant titillations of our artistic sense. And the cant phrase about all our sympathies being with her that is always on our lips makes me sick. We are, because we can't help it, profiting by their distress. We are making money out of them, hand over fist.

The poor prisoners, somebody says! Yes, it is rather nice to think that we are the mainstay of the poor prisoners in those dreadful camps, and the soup kitchen of poor dear Belgium. But that is about all you can say for us. Romantic idiot as my husband tells me I am, I should like to see the money-making instinct superseded by an altruistic effort to arrest the butchery that is going on. That isn't any of our business, they say; I say, I beg my adopted country's pardon, but I do consider it everybody's business to help to put out a fire, or to keep back the wolves from a forest clearing, or avert a collision at sea if one has the power. And although I am aware that any amount of moral effort could not prevent a collision when once two ships get near enough to each other through accident, I do not think the shock of advancing armies is so inevitable, for that is a matter of planning and pourparlers, and some moral suasion must enter into that.

Nations are like dogs straining at a leash ; the guilt of blood rests with those that hold the leash and do not try their uttermost to pull the screeching curs back.

Americans appear to have thought that dogs that want to fight must be allowed to fight, and that if nations feel like that, the pretext is not of the slightest importance. My little American niece comes to me and says, " Aunt Laura, dear, do tell us what they are fighting about over there ? " and " Couldn't it all be submitted to arbitration ? " One of the older boys snubbed the child, and told her curtly that there was nothing to submit. " They've got momentum now, and can't stop till they've torn each other limbless." And when, in my despair at so much wrongheadedness, I tell them the pretext was good enough in all conscience, the violation of Belgium, and hint that, after all, Germany began it, they say :

" Oh, everybody's forgotten all about that now, and you'll see when it's all settled, history'll lay the blame on both parties equally." And I know that that is true. That is Life.

They just strike me dumb. I think the more. Though I'm no politician, my father is a diplomat, I've lived all my childhood in Courts and Embassies. My husband is a Quinney, and a Congress man of '76, and I hear enough of politics one way and another to set me up in an opinion or two of my own.

I knew enough, in the beginning even, to be more upset than the people at home. Ilsa never wrote about it at all—never has—and Mamma put it second in her immense pre-occupation about Venice and her future. Except Papa—I did get a letter from Papa in which he said that in his opinion anything might happen, after Sarajevo !

But it is really astonishing how very few people in Europe were warned. Mamma, who although she talks a lot of nonsense and gives herself out for a fool, is not one, really, went on just as usual: she kept on Anatole, and signed the agreement for the house in Scotland after the sixth of July. Papa objected ; but then, every one knows what Mamma is : absolutely mulish when she has made up her mind to a course, especially anything that remotely concerns Venice. What Venice wants has to be, one way or another. Venice is her lodestar, and no one has any influence over her except Venice. Venice could work Mamma for her own good, but

Venice doesn't ever know what her own good is, and doesn't think she cares. She's like a dog after truffles; she digs for them, and so long as she gets them she wants nothing else. Truffles with her mean immediate gratification. She is very short-sighted, is my little sister, and chock-full of crazes—the literary one, at present. That Mamma cannot give her. But Venice has a very good eye for creature comforts as well, and that is Mamma's business. The summer holiday has been a difficulty since they gave up Beardmore. Mamma fancied that of the things that offered just then Venice preferred a house in Scotland; it was just a chance that they did not take the château of the Baron De Crawhez at Spa for the summer. Mamma always said that De Crawhez was mad on Venice, but I rather fancy that the Belgian Count hankered after some of the advantages of the Arles prestige—an English countess, *ma foi!* one of the best, the oldest English families! Anyhow, De Crawhez offered to let his château to Mamma at a ridiculously cheap rate, and that appealed to Mamma so much that if Venice had lifted up her little finger in favour of it she would have closed with him in a moment. But Venice wouldn't; she had never been at Spa during the August season, and old Colonel Dysart there told her it was always full of Germans then—no English or French or Americans at all.

In the light of what has happened, it's lucky they didn't take it! I am sure I don't know what would have happened to them. Spa was spared, for it didn't resist. Still, they'd have been locked up there for ages.

When Venice is pleased, or even content, Mother is more than pleased—she is jubilant. It is absurd, but Mother lives for Venice, and she isn't on the shelf by any means. She married at sixteen, a fact that people always forget to take into account when they marvel at her enormous vitality. She has still pretensions. She's the mother duck who has kept her hair and her figure, and my husband says that, taking her altogether, he'd back her any day against what he calls "the over-rated Venice." And the young men find the mother quite as attractive as the daughter, by all accounts. She is the one at parties that they surround, while she tries to efface herself in favour of Venice, and does not succeed. My theory is that men *will* go after the woman that amuses them most at the moment and gives them the quickest return for their expenditure of energy, for that's all it is. Society's



a game, like cricket or golf or billiards. That's my explanation of the fact that Mother really seems to have more professed admirers than Venice. There is Sir James Molendinar, the railway king, always to be met at Park Crescent, and taking Mother to tea on the Terrace all the time; and Sir Audely Bar, whom she took to her own use when Venice was a mere child and Papa in Diplomacy, and whom she has kept ever since.

I've never seen him, but they used, at Bucharest, to call him "the curate," and certainly Mother works him just as I have heard vicars' wives do use curates. She calls him "the useful creature." He is a poet, but so rich that I suppose he's what they call a dilettante. He travels too much to settle down to anything. I suspect that during Ilsa's palmy days he was one of "hers," and having had no use for him, as indeed she never did have for anything respectable, she ceded him to Mother. She would cede anything to anybody, that's the worst of my second sister.

Sir Audely is quite an elder brother to Venice, so I hear, and gets her poems into magazines for her. She is said by the papers to "be possessed of true poetic genius." They make a fuss about her and her gift over here, but I fancy her title goes a long way. I never can see anything in what she writes, myself; but then, I am only a sister. What amuses me is the way Mother looks upon her daughter's faculty of verse-stringing: she treats it as a cat does a mouse, letting it run a little way and then recalling it by a pat, alternately encouraging it and snubbing it. She is proud of her talent, but she is afraid that it will stand in the way of her getting married.

My second sister Ilsa, short for Elizabeth, is her danger semaphore, as it were, for Ilsa is supposed to have mismanaged her marriage prospects. She has certainly managed to get talked about. She is the wit of the family, although, apart from her impediment, she never seems to me to say anything so very remarkable. The moment she begins to drawl, they are all at attention, and begin to he-hee as a matter of course. I think it is half kindness—the wish to please Ilsa and give her something to live for. And wit is quite a good asset in a girl who has outlived her vogue as a beauty and is beginning to grow rather stout and puffy. Ilsa was quite lovely as a girl—like Mother, very fair, with splendid honey-coloured hair and soft complexion. I don't

know how she has worn, but Cyrus P. Whiteing, whom I sent over with a letter of introduction, said she was handsome but washed out, like a mirror you had breathed on. *Re* her wit—in comparison with Mother and Venice, who were absolutely incapable of seeing a joke, she was a humorist. Ilsa is more like Papa, and some of his sayings are recorded in contemporary memoirs; but from Cyrus I gathered there was very little left, except the twinkle in his dear kind eyes.

I sometimes wonder if it is Ilsa's sense of humour which has ruined her—or saved her? It depends which way you look at it. She was always, from her sixteenth year, sublimely reckless, but when it came to the point of fulfilling the expectation she had raised, her sense of the ridiculous, which stands her in stead of dignity, prevented her from realizing the fruits of her dash and daring, and she retired, maimed in her honour, maimed in every sort of way. . . .

I remember her in her youth—I have heard of her in her middle youth—she was up to anything, said anything, looked anything, did anything, threw her bonnet over the windmill, but as I gather never actually went after it, brought her mad acts to their logical conclusion. That's my explanation of the scandals about her. I mean, that in the old days Ilsa would have been a king's mistress, and doubtless an exceedingly kind, charitable, and altogether meritorious person; but in the London of the twentieth century, what could a girl of that temperament do?

Of course she was too lazy to fall in love and lose the world for it; she just preferred nice circumstances, good clothes to wear and luxury all round her, like a complacent fish swimming in a tank of warmed water. One sees how it was. She just got talked about and then "left," and poor Mother thinks it is *her* fault, and harries poor little Venice socially in consequence.

She considers that poor Ilsa is her "failure." Nonsense, I say, if it wasn't so pathetic! Ilsa is just an anachronism, and Mother's treatment had nothing to do with her way of behaving. Nature—the old Adam of old families!

Of course I should be banned if it was known that I had formed such theories over my own sister, and what, to be practical, one has to do, is to shut one's mouth and help her—using her title and position for all they are worth; and when the smoke of her misdeeds blows over here, pass it all off as the tittle-tattle of the jealous, and an instance

of the supreme arrogance of the British aristocracy who have not, nor need to have, any care for appearances. Before the war I tried to get her out here for a season—I believe I could have married her off—but she wouldn't come. None of them will come. They prefer to jog along together.

There is one thing to be said: my family is a very united one. They are all devoted to each other in their funny ways. Mother, of course, adores Venice and Papa, but is rather shy of Ilsa, whom she doesn't pretend to understand, but whom she consults on every point. Venice adores Ilsa and tries to love her mother as much as her mother loves her, but finds it uphill work, for she is so totally remote in temperament. She harks back to our great Aunt Corisande Wheler, the poetess of her day—a rather wild creature, I think, who died in a convent. Venice is really devoted to Ilsa, who only really cares for her father. Indeed, they all are devoted to Papa, and do what he tells them, in the ultimate resort. Even Mother obeys Papa when once he puts his foot down, though it is the object of her life to keep that foot off the floor.

And all the *ménage* revolves round Venice; they toady her just as if she were the boy that's gone. I call her Romanilla. There's Effel—they call her Effel because Venice can't manage "th": a sign of race, Audely Bar says, I am told—Effel is kept on as companion, because Venice doesn't mind Effel and is willing to go about with her, and Mother can trust her anywhere with Effel. I don't know what they would do without Effel, and I don't know what I should do for news of my family without Effel's letters to correct the others', for really, they do have tales! They are all literary artists when it comes to relating experiences.

I get a clearer idea of the family politics and aims and characteristics from Effel, who writes quite frankly, without a notion that she is giving them away. She doesn't realize in the least that I can see she hates Venice and adores Mother and has a more than tenderness for the tutor.

"Lucy," otherwise Mr. John Everard Lucing, shares with Effel Jones the honour of being what Mother calls an old retainer of the family. He was Papa's secretary—one of them—at Vienna, and when Papa retired they made him tutor to Venice, by way of giving him a job and excuse to go on living with them. He has given Venice all the education she has got, chiefly Latin which she is very quick at, though never good at *cours* and classes. Too proud and inattentive,

and Mother always backed her up in insubordination. She had a try at sending her to one of the High Schools Aunt Minna patronized, and there is a story of Venice, when she was scolded by a timid head-mistress for some neglect of duty, turning round and giving her the full benefit of the Arles Stare. "Insolent creature!" she remarked. But the class mistress was not floored, the imposition was imposed, and Venice was shortly after removed from the school.

Lucy is humble, and has no notion how useful he is and how badly they would do without him. He is just grateful for being allowed to make one of the family and being near Miss Effel Jones. He loves her, but it has been established that the unfortunate two can never afford to marry. Mother could not afford to lose them, that is nearer it. They neither of them ever ask for or get a holiday, because they can never, in the nature of the St. Remy routine, be spared at one and the same time, and unless they took their change together it would be no good to them. Papa needs an arm to go up and down stairs with, if there was nothing else, and there *is*—lots more.

Papa is getting to look very old and infirm, I hear. Mother, on the other hand, seems to keep her looks, such as they are. Cyrus Whiteing spoke of Papa's "child wife" and her yellow mop of hair against his grey tufts. He liked Mother best too. He is nearly a millionaire, and I thought Venice might take to him, but *he* didn't. His comments on her were crudeness itself, but most illuminating. And as he wasn't going to be my brother-in-law, and I need never see him again, I let him run on. He quite saw through Mother's game. It is so pathetically, nobly, transparent. And he was quite determined to tell *me*, her daughter, and the sister of the foolish virgin—that's what he called Venice—where exactly it had failed. He exonerated Venice from husband-hunting, and so I was able to listen to him.

Mother, he maintained, goes the wrong way to work. She is so fond of Venice that she wants her to enjoy herself, and prepare at the same time for a moneyed future. So she commits the error of cheapening her exquisite goods, lets her hob-nob with Tom, Dick, and Harry, and sandwiches eligibles with detrimentals in a way that is detrimental to the eligibles, making them feel that the Lady Venice is no particular catch. Venice, who didn't ring his bell, is, he admits, from one point of view the sweetest-tempered, most

generous and most guileless creature in the world, but from another, equally cogent point of view, the vainest, most egotistical, most "affected piece" he ever came across. He does not mince phrases. She is—the way he sees her—lazy, idle, and unoccupied, and yet fancies she fills every moment of her time, and is overdone with work. She keeps animals she lets die of neglect; she fusses and complains about the working of the household, admirably run by her lady mother, but does nothing to remedy it. She likes visitors about the place, but does not undertake to entertain them. She is untidy, and puts on her clothes so carelessly that he was sure she wouldn't keep together if it wasn't for the gentleman called Lucy, who "does up" her back, ties her shoelaces, pushes random hairpins home, and lends her his large man's handkerchief when she has spilt a teacupful of tea or a pound of black treacle, of which she is very fond, over the front of her dress! If Lucy wanted her: he's the man that deserves her. Cyrus P. thinks her pretty in a sort of way, but that she does not make the most of her points. He says her long neck is nearly worth a trip to Europe to see, but that her underlip has a nasty trick of shooting out that will spoil her looks later on.

"Imagine Lady Vennus mistress of *my* house, slopping about in Empire teagowns first thing in the morning, dipping her sleeves in the butter, with her neck bare and covered with bead necklaces! Imagine the hash she'd make of the "books" if she did condescend to look at them! She's got a cheque-book all right, but she lost it twice while I was there, and the second time it was found in the dust-bin."

He said the sight of her eating figs spoilt his lunch one day, and that the crack of her gnawing nougat all day long would "rattle him back to America."

"Say! She won't have the ghost of a complexion in a year or so," he warned me. "She won't last like that Venetian Bead, Lady Ilsa. And their chef is enough to ruin the complexion of any girl in the world who didn't set a watch on her appetite. Queer-looking fellow, too!"

There *was* something very fishy about the way they got Anatole. He produced all sorts of credentials, but anybody can forge letters. But Mother went headlong as usual and he had no objection to coming to England, so as to improve his command of language. Mother really treated De Crawhez very badly, carrying off his cook like that, though it will

hardly affect him now, for I believe he was shot in the first week. Mother has now left off crowing over the affair, and telling everybody how the moment her teeth met in his *Chateaubriand de pommes* at the lunch poor De Crawhez gave them at his place at Marteau, she was determined to have him. I am convinced it was Venice's teeth that met and closed on that *Chateaubriand*. She is the greedy one; Mother doesn't care what she eats. In the end they secured the services of Anatole at £80 a year, and took him back to England with them. Venice wrote complacently that he looked delightfully sinister, and added a distinct lustre to their party, for everybody thought he was their courier, and he gave himself the airs of one, and as a matter of fact helped them a good deal in many ways, by palavering officials and getting their luggage through, and so on. I understand they bought up a whole place—Montjoie on the German side, famous for marquetry furniture. They take some getting through, they do.

Venice created quite a scandal on the boat and in the hotels by hanging about the dark courier. She found his conversation so interesting. She couldn't get enough of it at first. She used to get him to talk about his wonderful past. He admitted, she said, to having been in all sorts of tight places; to having been arrested in Odessa, and thrown into Peter and Paul in Petersburg; that he had fought at the siege of Adrianople, and got a scar there, which was the reason he always wore a beard—"not to frighten the ladies."

Effel, had a thorough distrust of Anatole, and told me that after he came she was careful to lock her door at night. Funny, when on the other hand Anatole was sleeping in the pantry to cherish the plate! I never supposed for a moment that he was a mere ordinary thief; that would be to insult his peculiar talents. He seemed far more likely to spare their property and cut their throats one dark night, just to keep his hand in, if one was to believe all those tall stories of his previous career!

After Venice, and Papa, and this Sir Audely Bar, Anatole was the person Mother set most store by. He made himself indispensable to her. And there's no denying that Cyrus P. was awfully impressed by Mother's chef, and considered him her best social asset, and that his cuisine would have got Venice off if anything would.

And isn't it, in the end, all queer together? For my queer, fussy, muddly, darling people are, after all, and in effect, the real genuine article, the aristocrats of England, the old feudal system personified, its outcome, the inheritors of all its glories and responsibilities. And there they are, carrying on over there in their own queer fashion: Mother buying furniture cheap, sneaking other people's servants, wearing her dozen or so of woollen petticoats with the strings tied round her waist, and using her funny old North country expressions now and then that are so valid and striking. Venice—well, there it is—Cyrus P. was disappointed in Venice. She should have been like Tennyson's Maud, "icily regular, splendidly null," but she had a pout and ate like a pig and put her clothes on anyhow.

I had to explain to him that that was all there was, in this kind, and that we over here don't realize how human and humdrum aristocrats are, with all the bourgeois virtues and smugness, and hardly picturesque, according to America's false, vamped-up ideal.

Something back of it all, that comes out—at least I think it does—in these letters: something like a patina, unalterable, ineradicable, . . . a saving grace that will stand them—in the Last Ditch—if they come to it!

Sitting here at my window, looking out over the white yachts towards Jamestown and Sanderstown—and there is a grey destroyer pushing up towards the hidden Naval School: if we *did* but come in!—I seem to see that funny, dear little dot of green over there where the trees are so heavy, like painted copper, not like our trees, mere wisps of thin-leaved tallness, eaten by bugs and worms and katydid till they are, in August, as leafless as in November—that odd rococo anachronism of a beloved island of ours. And even to-day she has muddled through—if not to victory then at least to honour: to the honour of my own people, the queer, feudal survivals who won Waterloo in the playground of Eton—and conducted the wonderful Mons retreat from the Carlton Grill and the Night Clubs! . . . But the traditions of honour, of Crécy and Agincourt—and of Bannockburn and Rhudland—survived at least far enough to let poor old England say to the German Chancellor that when it came to sustaining treaty obligations Great Britain was not accustomed to consider the consequences! A fine speech that, that our—yes *Our!*—Ambassador made on August 4th, a

year ago. And it was dictated by *my* people: by *our* traditions. . . .

For I suppose we aristocrats *are*, literally, in the Last Ditch! However the war goes, Armageddon will wipe out Crécy; and however many of our boys win their spurs in the Ypres salient, Privilege will be at an end in the world, one way or another. . . .

Or perhaps it mayn't! . . . Perhaps this Last Ditch that we are in, may be The Last—because we shall never be in the ditch, or even down the drain again! We may go forward victoriously, and for ever, after this . . . ?

And after all our country might do worse. You can't say that my mother is an ignoble woman—with her extraordinary simplicity and singleness of purpose over cooks and houses and junketings all during Armageddon, just to get her daughter happily married! For, I suppose, she unconsciously recognizes it is her main job in life—just to perpetuate the species—and drives straight to it like a horse with blinkers on, in the storm and hail of shells and a world crumbling before her feet. . . . I admire her, though she is my own mother. I forgive her poor little attempts to reconcile conflicting spheres of interest—her palterings, and want of civic imagination. . . . And my father is all good. . . . And Venice is a prig—but she is rather a dear, too. . . . And Ilsa is a buccancer; but buccaneers are needed in Island races. . . .

It was my father's tradition that made us declare war on Germany, when on August 4th, 1914, they violated neutrality by crossing the Belgian frontier "near a place called Gemmenich."

Perhaps it didn't pay us—to vindicate honour! God knows whether it will pay us or not! But "paying" isn't everything; and if our (yes, I will write *our* in spite of Congressmen and senators and the three-and-forty stars on Old Glory), if our Empire goes down in a Last Ditch alone with the barons of Crécy and Agincourt—and Ciro's; if the whole nation goes down with the Last Ditchers—one and all, in a universal conflagration—dying so, we shan't go without our little blaze of glory . . . our trailing clouds of it. . . .

And then. . . . "Afflavit deus et dissipati sunt!" Elizabeth put upon her Armada medal. Perhaps God will still blow, and the b——y Huns be dispersed!

Dear God, do it soon!



## II

*From The Lady Arles to Mrs. Laura P. Quinney*

PARK CRESCENT.

OH what a plaguy world this is of ours, dear, especially when one gets up against people who are obstinate for obstinacy's sake and just to assert their dormant authority. Now Arles is a very good sleeping partner and very seldom attempts to put his foot down. I generally manage to get in first and put mine. I shall pull this new difficulty all right in the end, but it is awkward for the moment, for it cuts at the root of my plans for the summer. This horrid mess in the Balkans will have no results politically, nothing ever does over there: it's a pot that's always stewing and never comes to the boil; but the murder of the Archduke has upset us all a good deal, especially Arles, who is getting to be an old man. He didn't care for the Archduke personally so much, it is more as it affects Us. He has taken all sorts of absurd precautionary ideas into his dear old head: wants me to dismiss our excellent Anatole, and give up the idea of going abroad at all this summer!

Now, we haven't missed for ten years, and Ilsa and Venice have grown to count on it. In the discussions *re* the place we should choose, I tended to Nauheim, and do still. My knees are rather worse than I like to own, and dear Dr. Bittelmann understands them, and has only to take up the thread again from last year when I put myself into his hands, unreservedly. But though Venice is quite nice about it, I rather suspected her of wanting to go to Spa, where we also were last year, as you know. Baron de Crawhez admires her, certainly, and it does make a health resort so much more interesting to a young girl if there is some one there whom she knows is ready to philander with her and who wouldn't be a match I should absolutely have to disapprove of if it came to anything. He really gave up

Anatole to us because he could not refuse Venice anything, not even a cook, that she had set her heart on. He now offers to let me his house at Marteau cheap, but that's not much good, for he can't both let his house to us and live in it and entertain us, so one of the reasons for Spa is gone. Nauheim was in the ascendant until this tit-up at Sarajevo, and Arles' craze of forbidding us to go abroad till things are more settled. I have said that he must have it out with Venice himself, putting it all on him. He may succeed in influencing her, especially as she does not quite know her own mind. . . .

As for England, I have plenty of alternatives. In Scotland—she liked the idea of Scotland if it has to be England—there is the Musters-Graham's house just over the border that I could have, only I have let it slide because Venice said abroad in August, whatever she did in September.

The affair of Sarajevo touches the elder generation, to which Arles and I belong, more closely than it does the younger ones. I knew the poor dear Archduke well: he was dear to me during all the years that Arles had Vienna. I quite loved him and his wife. It is shocking enough that any one with whom one has been in direct personal contact should have met with a violent death, but it is one of the penalties of greatness that the Anarchist is always lying in wait. Even our Edward the Seventh was shot at in the station at Brussels, and was, I heard, very generous and unvengeful. Of course he wasn't touched at all. If you number crowned heads among your friends you must expect shocks of this kind now and then. Still, I don't think any international fracas of that kind should be allowed to affect one's ordinary plans over here. These half savage people have recourse to the sword and to chemicals in settlement of the most trifling disputes, and are always shooting and murdering and bombing each other in cafés and public processions. I've got a piece of the Queen of Spain's dress that was all spattered with blood when they tried to kill her and her husband at Madrid. Gruesome relic, isn't it?

I must contrive to manage Arles, if Venice really is set on a foreign trip. He is so annoying when he gets on his high prophetic horse, and works off the stale political tips he acquired in his ambassadorial career. I should be the last

to belittle his usefulness, only it was rather long ago and events move so quickly. So when he waggles his dear old head and says that after Sarajevo anything may happen, I say *Che sarà, sarà!* and that it mayn't even *sarà*, but turn out a mare's nest after all. At all events I am certain I ought not to sacrifice my daughter's future to his fears.

The season has been disappointing to both of us, and Venice is looking paler than usual—she is called The White Snowdrop, you know. One is bound for her sake to make some coherent arrangements for getting away, even if one does give in to Arles' prejudices and stay in Great Britain. And if others take fright too, and there are plenty of nervous people about, houses in England will be hard to get, and I believe that I had better secure the refusal of Lochroyan Hall for next month. If the season doesn't improve Venice will agree to anything just to get away and shake the dust of it off her feet. It's been no good at all this year. Venice hasn't had at all a good time, and resents it. Nobody has given anything to speak of, not even garden parties, and the weather has been perfect. But people seem to have been too spiritless even to profit by the cheapness of strawberries that we have had quite a glut of. It is too late for things to pull themselves together again. The season is a delicate plant, and anything, almost, that gives it the slightest jog in the wrong direction ruins it. A solidly rainy June of course finishes it. If the Fourth, when we used to go down to see my boy at Eton, was showery, my heart was always in my boots.

This year—well, the Irish business perhaps was what did it and feeding Suffragettes through the nose! Tiresome creatures! And ould Ireland always *is* a bother. And both not a bit of good, socially speaking. Without Anatole it would not be the least good in the world taking a house and hoping to get the right people together. And if I diplomatize and allow it to be known that I am giving my chef a holiday and taking a temporary cook for the time being, or borrowing Lady Dowlais' Myddleton, the notion of that will drive them away all the same. I see them saying, "We will wait to go and stop with dear Beaty until she has got back her chef!"

If I were to propose it to Venice, of course she'd say at once, "What fun!" and that it would be exactly what she'd like to do—return to Nature. But I know her nature

better, and so does Anatole. He would do anything he says for Lady Venice, because she is greedy, as every pretty woman ought to be. I'm no satisfaction to him, for I don't care a hang what I eat: as often as not I lunch off a boiled Spanish onion and breakfast on porridge, taken standing, so as to be quick and get after my affairs.

The one real drawback to Anatole is his temper. Indeed, when I'm giving an important dinner, crowned heads and so on, and Anatole feels that his European reputation is at stake, our basement becomes a veritable Inferno for all concerned. Audely compares it to the stokehold of a Dreadnought during a naval engagement, and Anatole himself to the King of the Infernal Regions, Pluto, or Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness, and I don't know what abusive terms collected from his reading, for which he has more time than I have.

Anatole is certainly odd looking; I wish you could see him, Laura. He has very red lips, peeping out of a little pointed beard as stiff as a shaving brush. He wears his hair brushed up into a toupet; and it *must* be dyed, it has such queer steely blue lights in it, when you see it in the sun, which I don't very often, for he mostly wears a bowler which quite hides the top of his head, being several sizes too big for him, I should think. He never takes it off when I meet him coming in from his daily drive—he has a little run-about of his own that he goes all over the place in, driving himself. He is so clever and handy. He has told me that he prefers women servants to deal with, so to please him I have got rid gradually of all the men, excepting old Crookes, who has been with us since Ilsa was born, and who isn't much good now, except at announcing in a special voice he gets up for the occasion and which rather startles and amuses people. Anatole has no objection to Crookes, but he says young footmen are more trouble than they are worth. I never demur on questions of management with Anatole, but treat him like the artist he is. And I never presume to pump him about his wonderful past, though Venice does sometimes. She has pieced out the dear man's history from what he lets slip in moments of confidence, and is quite sure that he has been at some one time or other in the Secret Service of some country, perhaps our own! . . .

Her father laughs at her, saying that we don't need the services of such scallywags as that, and that he is probably

an ex-Apache or perhaps a circus-master. Arles' grudge against Anatole is really a culinary one, and began from the moment he entered our service and put forth his powers and made a magnificent *Pâté de lièvre*. Arles, whose stomach has been ruined by foreign cookery, yelled for something plain, and got the kitchenmaid to fry him a mutton chop and a boiled potato.

"That man will kill me some day," he observed humorously.

He has got Anatole regularly on his nerves, although Anatole is a brick and risks spoiling his hand to give Arles the simple English stuff he wants, and he never sees him now. We think it wiser. That will make it easier to get Anatole with us to Lochroyan, if I do finally decide to clinch the matter and deceive Arles for his good—or rather Venice's.

For of course it will be for Venice and her house party that I shall run my neck into the noose. . . . I don't care what I do if I can only get her settled in the only proper way for women, *i.e.* happily married to a good man of her own rank. I say a good man, somebody equal to her in every way; while it has come to this with Ilsa, that any sort of merely respectable engagement I would welcome for her. But Venice must not be allowed to drag her beauty and her title in the mud as poor Ilsa has done one way and another. Of course, *re* the tittle-tattle Ilsa has incurred, beautiful girls always do lap up jealousies, and I do not—nor do you, I hope—believe for one moment one tenth of the horrid things they say about her. It is just idle club talk, most of it, the sort of disgusting things men do dare to say about the women they have been playing with, when they get back to the smoking-room.

Lucy always maintains that men *don't* talk in smoking-rooms, that that is a pure woman's delusion; and when I try to get from him the substance of what they say, declares stiffly he never hears anything at all about the Lady Ilsa except what every one knows, that she has a tongue and flicks men frightfully on the raw with it sometimes, not to speak of the women she pulverizes till they revenge themselves by scandalizing her. . . . Lucy is so very gentlemanly I can get nothing out of him, though I think it is his duty, as my servant, to keep me in "the know" as to the things he knows.

Your Aunt Minna takes care to do that. She always makes it her business to retail the gossip she says she hears

from men. Queer sort of men, to abuse and backbite a woman's own niece—by marriage—to her face! I believe she invents things, especially what D'Acosta said about the fiver, which I own worried me a good bit, because it is so insidiously destructive of a girl's reputation. Effel, dear staunch Effel, tries to comfort me by saying, that taking it at the lowest and most cynical, she is certain Lady Ilsa is too lazy to put herself out to get a five-pun' note free—that the very smallness of sum named makes it impossible, and only a baseless aspersion of D'Acosta's, whom I shall cut dead next time I meet him—in the only place where one does meet cad's like him, your Aunt Minna's drawing-room.

Even Effel admits that she thinks that dear Lady Ilsa has made herself a little too cheap here and there, out of good nature more than anything else—"trailed" too much, and wasted the most splendid opportunities a young woman ever had.

She was indeed the sweetest creature to look at when she was twenty, all pale gold and pink and white, slim and tall, and even then so fond of admiration that she could refuse no one anything if they flattered her. And they do still. She has tons of admirers. As she says humorously, all the *small* men in London are at her feet. Jerry Teague, whom I know she refused, is only five foot one, and as spiteful as cripples usually are. It is quite likely that he is responsible for the fiver story: a pound a foot—of malice! She is five foot six in her silk stockings.

And rich men do seem to gravitate to Ilsa as to a magnet, and she does not spurn them, altogether; why should she? They are harmless if uninteresting, and most of them have got wives whom they would bring here if I asked them, and who don't *seem* jealous. She makes no difference between old or young, providing they pet her and spoil her. She was like that from a baby, when I remember her in her little fluffy white frock, sitting on old M. Bloch's knee, and trying to pull the diamond off his watch chain.

That's pretty well what she does now, except for the difference of age and petticoats. . . . She loves baubles, and these old boys, who make a thousand pounds a minute in their businesses and are running over with unused cash, like to see her happy, and are quite content with a smile now and then. They spoil the look of our drawing-room a good deal; but then, I had rather she forgathered with

them *here* than be constantly seen about in their company in restaurants. Then there are the journalists, who simply infest the house, imploring her to let herself be interviewed. She says it pays her, as well as being kind ; for if they write her up, the shops send her things to wear, and so get described.

I have always blamed Meg Twells for bringing this set about her and inspiring in her the itch for new clothes. But it has now become an institution, and it's no good cavilling at it.

Luckily no exception can be taken to her other comrades, who are—though poor subalterns, most of them, without a bob—above reproach. I like them, for they neutralize the frowsy appearance of some of the others. Ilsa laughingly calls them her *amants de cœur*, and allows them to take her to dinners at the Spitzbergen or the Carlton and the theatre afterwards. It's a pity she is so good-natured and lets the middle-aged ones with sparkling tie-pins "dine" her too. Old Mr. Jehoshaphat drives a coach and "tools" her down to Brighton now and again—with a party, mind you!—for the week end. There's propriety in numbers, and it's *always* a party, even though it's a party I don't approve of. I went once myself, to see if it was all right. That was rather against the grain and I felt like a fish out of water but if a mother elects to fling her mantle over her daughter she has to include her daughter's associates as well. My duty is to prevent Ilsa's heady actions from being misconstrued, and I do what I can.

One thing I will *not* allow, and that is Venice to go about with Ilsa. Though she dotes on her sister, she is fairly reasonable about this fiat of mine ; she does not really care for the people Ilsa has got about her. And though I permitted her once to go to Paris with Ilsa and Meg I never will again. Ilsa herself vetoes that, luckily ; she says Venice was a dreadful bore, insisting on spending all their time in the Morgue or the Musée Guimet, where she got a thorough sickener of Thaïs and Serapion. Venice used to go and gloat on those two mummies for hours ! What Ilsa and Meg go to Paris for isn't mummies, but *les grandes couturières* and the Galerie Lafayette that Ilsa thinks nothing of spending the day in. And really Ilsa's week's shopping is worth while—the wonderful things she secures for next to nothing. Thank Goodness I'm not tempted ; they are not the style I should like for Venice, whom I dress very simply.

I have no right to interfere with Ilsa. She is a major and no expense, for she hands on most of the allowance her father gives her to me for board and lodging. She is rather proud, and says that it would be indecent to let me pay for goings on I don't approve of. And these wonderful things are given her in return for her allowing them to use her name as an advertisement.

I refuse to let her pass these things on to Venice, even if they suited her. Somehow my whole being rises up against it. I cannot have the child associated in any way with Ilsa's Clothes Trust, as I call it. She exchanges them with her friends, quite extensively, buys theirs and they buy hers. I don't know what *my* mother would have said. My mother wouldn't have put on a pair of gloves some one else had worn, much less an intimate garment like a dress-bodice. Though I must tell you Ilsa compasses many a little act of generosity out of it. Girl friends that can't for some reason or another afford to scrap their failures at the time, she takes them off them and pays the full price they gave, although they've had some wear out of them even. She can wear anything and make it look all right on her; so different to Venice, whose clothes never seem to belong to her at all.

Ilsa sometimes condescends to explain to me what is the matter (?) with Venice, *i.e.* why she doesn't attract. She says it's because Venice is utterly lacking in temperament. That seems to me an over-rated quality; I managed to get a good husband without it. Ilsa, who boasts the temperament of a cart-horse—what good has it done her? Temperament is, I believe, responsible for most of woman's misery, and certainly for a good many of the scandals of the world, from Helen of Troy downward. I should say it was the last thing in Pandora's box that got out, and wrecked everything. And yet, according to Ilsa, if you haven't got your due share, you are left severely alone by the other sex. It is true that Venice has never had an offer in her life except one—from Herr Papoof, her last music master; and that when Ilsa came out, on the other hand, all the men went down like ninepins. Her success was so immediate, that I don't wonder she lost her head. But temperament doesn't *marry*—it only has a good time.

Venice has been out eight seasons. I sometimes think it is this wretched flavour of authorship about her which puts people off. Certainly her poetry is a good deal warmer



than she is. People ask me how it is she knows so much. I can't tell them, except that they say people who write have a sixth sense—they apprehend things they don't really know, just as people say rather indecent things under chloroform.

I was very foolish not to put my foot down and stop it from the very beginning. But our ancestress Corisande Wheler started it in the family and got great credit for it in her day. And lots of aristocrats write and have written poetry. Look at Lord Lytton, and that other connexion of ours, Lady Anne Douglas, who wrote "The flowers of the forest are all weeded away!"

I thought it would be an amusement for the child and let her go on, and of course from the moment she published her first poem in *The Observer*, the Press was all on to her like a swarm of bees. And one hadn't the heart to damp her. She was so excited and flattered. I could not refuse to let her go to the dinners they gave to celebrate her "entry into Literature." People paid their guineas cheerfully to go to literary clubs to see my daughter eat her dinner. And she once made a speech—my little Venice!

A Mrs. Morton Leahy presided at the dinner, and was all over Venice at once, to promise to go and see her. I was dragged off there to call, and I confess I saw much to interest and nothing to give me alarm in their ménage. Mrs. Leahy is perfectly quiet and civil, although mad, and holding I believe quite unaccepted ideas about things in general. And she knows which side her bread is buttered too, and is always grasping social advantage and publicity, which of course we can give her. She contrives to attack us always on the score of charity. Venice is to write, she is to appear, she is to give her signature for the benefit of Russians, or authors, etc.! I'd rather give a roll of flannel and a gill of soup at once than lend my daughter to make the money to pay for them, for that is what it amounts to!

But Venice has made a friend of the daughter Ida, and now they want her to be bridesmaid to Miss Leahy!

Venice showed me the girl's letter. It was exceedingly ingenuous, but one can see that what she wants is not so much the "presence of her dearest friend at the most serious moment of her life," but that of Lady Venice St. Remy at the party afterwards. All those Fabian people are frightfully worldly, really. I like the girl Ida, myself: she is most

obliging and helpful. She assisted me, poor tyro that I am, most materially with the proofs I was correcting of an article I had rattled off at the behest of the editor of *The Casual Review* the other day. He pestered me so to give him my views as to what we have agreed to call the Boudoir Education of Infants. Prospective mothers can and ought to begin training at the earliest possible moment. The word Boudoir, suggested by Ilsa to describe it, is so delicate, I think.

Out of sheer good nature I consented. I am no good at punctuation; my ideas flow so rapidly, I have no time to think of that sort of subsidiary thing. I did it however, and, do you know, Laura, I who write to you, here, this day, actually earned five pounds by literature, so I oughtn't to abuse it. It shows that an ordinarily intelligent woman can quite well do this that Venice makes such a fuss about, if she gives her mind to it. And I can't say I even did that. Just sat down and let it run off the end of my pen, one day in the house!

I think I must try to give you a literary account of my dealings with Venice *re* the Leahy proposal, with speeches and quotation marks and all! It may amuse you.

I must first premise that I had already had a letter embodying the same request, only more formally, on her daughter's behalf from the mother. I had answered with the greatest politeness. One can't be offhand except with one's equals. I had said that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to allow it in her case, but that under the circumstances, I had to draw the line for Venice, not in the people at whose weddings she took part, but in the number of times she performed the ceremony. I took immense pains with that sentence. I went on to add that she has done it so often for her own friends and mine that I had had to issue a decree that next time Lady Venice appeared before the altar, it must be in the capacity of bride. Becoming more friendly and colloquial, I said my daughter owed it to the race from which she sprang to marry, and that it was no use defying superstition—"Three times a bridesmaid, never a bride!"

I got Effel to type me a copy of the letter, and showed it to Venice. Venice caught at a minor point, that I had written "Lady Venice." She said it was not right. I begged to differ. One had somehow to mark one's sense of Mrs. Leahy's inferior status, slight as it might be. Of

course I should not think of designating her by her title in a letter addressed to one of Us. I added coldly that I considered it a great stretch on my part to write to that sort of person at all, except in the third person.

"That, Mother," she retorted, "you know you never can manage. And any way it's *in* the circumstances, not *under*—I should think you might know that. How *could* you get under what is supposed to be all round you? For the sake of the race I think you ought to be careful to write even rude letters in good English."

That made me angry, and I retorted that she wouldn't have been able to twit her mother with bad grammar if I hadn't given her Latin lessons, and that that wasn't the way to get me to do what she wanted. She saw that at once.

"Sorry!" she said like a schoolgirl, and then went on to beg and pray that I would let her—this once—just this once! And she wouldn't ever ask me to let her be bridesmaid again. I was nearly on the point of yielding—I never can resist Venice when she pleads, and I took temporary refuge in the well-known proverb. She took me up:

"What about Ilsa, who has never been a bridesmaid at all? Being bridesmaid a thought too often isn't what has stopped *her* marrying, has it? And I am surprised at you, Mother, giving way to superstition like this. And even if you do choose to go by it, I am well over the three times by now. It's your fault that I have been it so often; you chose to go uniting the two stocks of Dalruan and St. Remy. A hundred and thirty-seven collaterals! Of course we have to help each other, turn and turn about, when it comes to our time to get married. . . . Let me see"—she started counting on her fingers, very elaborately, so as to irritate me—"Elizabeth Reveley—two Darcies—Virginia Fairs—Lily St. Just and Horace—Mary Chester—Cousin Sybil—that's seven times. Though I suppose," she added, taking a kick at me for poor Lily St. Just's trouble I helped her through, "you wouldn't count a *divorcée*?"

"I should *not*," I said. "It wasn't necessary, strictly speaking, and I only consented to please poor Lily. I admit I should not have allowed it. . . ."

"Well, six times—then. Pity, for there's luck in odd numbers, especially seven!"

I answered her patiently. "It's all very well—sixes and sevens—what does it matter? That's where we'll all be if

you insist on going on like this. Do you want to be a sort of perpetual bridesmaid, always dangling about on altar steps and holding people's gloves for them, until you're too old to be a bride yourself? It's unnatural. . . ."

She interrupted me. "I shouldn't mind. I'd rather stand and help other girls to make fools of themselves than do it myself. I'd rather go into a nice quiet dignified monastery like Lady Hester Stanhope—in the Levant, wasn't it? Do let me settle it and be bridesmaid for the last time and then go into a monastery and shave my hair and wear a pretty shirt with hair follicles to mortify me."

"You keep saying monastery—nunnery, I suppose you mean?" I rapped out, glad to have caught her out somewhere. "And I do wish you wouldn't go bringing up mad women out of these wretched memoirs you read——"

"Lady Hester was a relation, was she not?"

"Your great-great-aunt," I said. "But that's beside the point. Those days are over. You don't seem to have the least idea where you stand."

It was time. She can't go on living in a fool's paradise for ever. I told her then—exaggerating finely to make some impression, and with Ilsa's initial mistake in my mind all the time—that if that was the way she felt, it was sheer waste her going out at all. That we, Arles and I, could not afford the style it took to keep up the establishment on a marrying basis, couldn't go on dressing her in the way she copies from Ilsa, who is on a different footing altogether and is clever enough to get half her clothes for nothing. . . .

I saw she was preparing to say she could write and praise stays and soap and had a title that would be useful too, but I pretended not to hear, and rubbed it in till I saw she was getting upset and nearly crying. God help me! Of course I was only doing it to frighten her, for dear knows I would personally take the very shift off my back to be able to go on getting her the pretty things she has been used to, and she knows it. But she stood mum, while I told her brutally that she had had eight seasons, a house in town taken for her every year, a country residence at Beardmore with a staff of servants sufficient for unlimited visitors, spas or smart seaside in the summer and German baths and country-house visits in the autumn, and you know what that costs! I said we had done it all willingly, and pinched ourselves to afford it, but that it had now come

to the point that neither Arles nor I were willing to go on living beyond our means for ever or till she chose to give it up and go into her convent. . . .

I am afraid I was very vulgar, but I did feel somehow, as if I must, once for all, put the usual match-making mother's point of view before her. I think it was the suggestion of the convent in the Levant that did it. Arles had a rich aunt who went like that, and did literally refuse all sorts of good offers and ended in a nunnery, giving all her immense wealth to the nuns; and for her own sake Venice had to be made to see that consorting with derelicts and detrimentals and socialists leads straight to nowhere; that it's all very well as play, but that play ends, and she must begin to think seriously of her future and not waste her time making herself agreeable to men whom her father and myself could not look at for her for a moment. . . .

"Yes," she said quietly; "I know all that. But what am I to do? You say it is time I thought ahead—had these mean preoccupations about my own future. . . . I simply can't. . . . I'm not businesslike, or foreseeing at all. You've never brought me up to be so. I am just the ordinary, selfish, greedy sort of person who wants all the good she can get out of life and wants it now; I *do* desire to go on leading the sort of life you kindly give me, but if I've got to pay for it by attending to the main chance and choosing my friends for propriety and usefulness, not pleasure, I'd rather go without it all, and work in the fields—since you object to my being a nun like my ancestress," she added slyly, for she knows what I think about Aunt Corisande Wheler and her terrific waste of money.

"*You* work in the fields!" I nearly choked. "You, Lady Venice St. Remy! Thank God, no farmer in his senses would employ you."

"I should have thought my title, that you're always wanging into me, might have done the trick," said this astounding child. "However, it's no good! I am too old to change now. You may just as well give it up, Mother, and let me alone. Let me do anything I can that will keep me amused and out of mischief and convents. . . . A Perpetual Bridesmaid would be rather a funny profession. . . . But I say, how silly we are! All this talk and fuss because I want to give up a couple of hours on a certain day to oblige a friend."

"You want to make your mother, with all her traditions, sit by in misery for a couple of hours while you are standing among those people, associated with them in one of the most intimate ceremonies of life."

"For your sins, dear!" she said. "Think that you have been put in a pillory for an hour or two—and that it will soon be over!"

"Oh, no," I said. "I know these people. They are like an octopus. If I give way this time, they'll be sure to ask you to be godmother to the first baby, and hold it at the font."

She sneered.

"That's a little far-fetched, isn't it? Of course anything may happen? I might get engaged to one of the grooms-men."

I almost shouted. "One of Miss Leahy's grooms-men! *Il ne manquait que ça!* You would insult your father and me by an alliance with such a man as that, a dirty socialist, like the bridegroom, if he wasn't worse."

"Not necessarily dirty," she returned patiently. "Gerald has some quite useful friends that even you would not disdain—Blackleys and Gobles and so forth. People that give him work. But I can meet that sort of person in my own house. . . . Dear Mother, can't we stop this silly discussion about things that are never likely to happen, even if you do give permission, which I can see you are dying to. . . ."

She actually said that, and I did not contradict her. She appeared to ponder a moment and then resumed:

"Now look here, Mums (she very seldom calls me that), can't I meet you somehow? Supposing I told these dangerous persons that I am actually engaged, so as to keep them off? Or—it is only July—I might happen to be really engaged before September, if that would please you? I'm sure I take no interest in what happens to me in that respect. But I could easily manage it, if I set myself to do it. There are one or two men that I should only have to signify my pleasure—just relax my well-known frigidity you complain of a little. . . . I don't mind Philip Wyandotte, and I could easily sneak him from Ilsa if I wanted to; he is nearer my age. And there's another quite suitable victim. . . ." She appeared to smile at the recollection of "passages." . . .

She went on: "Oh, I assure you, I'm not so hard up for admirers as you all seem to think—I've seen you two and Effel laying your silly old heads together. Now—I mean

this, Mother; honest Injun!—if by the time Ida's wedding is really due to come off I am able to give you the assurance that I have got a really serious affair on hand—am engaged if you like—will you let me tell Ida that I'm at her service for the one morning—that's all it is?"

She had mentioned Philip Wyandotte, and he is very well off; I should say one of the most stable young fellows in England as far as money goes, and not too nearly related. It is true that he is far too young for Ilsa, who only runs him for his father's sake, and he is even a year younger than Venice, but that wouldn't matter much. He is also a terrible flirt, but it would do Venice good to be worried a little that way. . . . And the other man she spoke of . . .

I turned it all over in my poor mind during those few nervous moments while she stood there like a statue—Venice never fidgets or plays with things to give her a countenance. Of course she was only talking in joke and did not expect me to take her seriously. Still I knew that she wouldn't have mentioned names unless there had been some little idea in her mind of their possibilities as a flirtation. Finally, I turned round—I had not wanted her to see *my* play of countenance—and said, laughing, so as to as nearly as possible carry on the conversation in the light vein of chaff she had started:

"My dear girl, if, honestly, you could come and tell me you had taken up with a really nice young fellow like—any of those you have mentioned"—I looked at her inquiringly, with some slight idea of leading her on to give the other name, but it was no good. She is never to be cajoled—"any one, in fact, that your father and I could approve of—why, if you could only just show us that you did take these things a little into account and were able to inspire in men a feeling of security—could meet them half way—took *some* interest in the more serious things of life—for the love of a good man is important, whatever you flighty girls may think—I shouldn't have the least objection to your being bridesmaid every single day of your life right up to the day of your own wedding, which, oh dear! I *shall* be so glad to see definitely on the *tapis*. . . ."

She interrupted me.

"So that's a promise, is it?"

And pranced off to her own study, for all the world like a child to whom you have given a sugar plum.

I hope my concession *re* Ida Leahy's wedding will be like a sugar plum and make the pill of my terrible lecture go down. It must have been a rather bitter nut for a butterfly like Venice to crack. And after all, as she says, it isn't such an immense thing to let her stand just for half an hour in church behind a great friend like Ida, and the wedding won't be till we all come back from Nauheim or Scotland, if we go there, and people won't notice the name in the papers so much as they would in the season, that's one comfort. And Philip Wyandotte can be asked to come to us in Scotland if we go. An argument for Scotland, which I suppose it will just have to be now. He is a delightful young fellow, and only a fifth cousin. Ilsa only likes him because he is Paul Wyandotte's son who was killed in the Boer War, and whom she had a penchant for. All the women want him, and try to flirt with him, and I rather believe in what Venice says, that if she relaxes her austerity, and lets herself go with him a little, she can get him. Flirts like Philip always in the end fall to the stiff, proud, cold girls. She spoke of another one—I wonder who that is?

Venice has revealed unexpected depths in her. I wonder, Laura, if she is really not a bit of a minx?



### III

#### *From The Lady Venice St. Remy*

PARK CRESCENT.

You know what Mother is. How many daughters say that, don't they? But it *is* a difficult relation. They say that, too. I suppose the relation is really impossible from the moment one is born. But I do love Mother, and mean to be a good daughter to her. Even if I didn't I should try to get on with her for æsthetic reasons. I consider that people who write poetry ought to be more careful than others in their domestic relations, for if a genius behaves badly, it is a reproach and slur on the whole brotherhood of art.

Shelley was an angel of light, but a domestic scourge. Byron was vulgar. Robert Browning is the only poet I can think of who succeeded in being a good husband and father; but then, some people think he wasn't a good poet.

But I'm not either a Shelley or a Browning, nor going to be, in spite of Mother's pride in me. I'm not even a Mrs. Browning. Mother would like me to be a Mrs. Hemans—"Oh call my brother back to me!" The Mrs. Hemans sort would get on with any amount of relations.

If Mother wouldn't be so proud of me, life would be easier. But she never has a thought for any one else. She retails all my lightest words and gestures since I was a child to people whom it profoundly bores. It is the penalty of being born at such a big interval after you and Ilsa. My Future, my Future! It has got to be a Future of her choosing, not mine.

I want it to be a literary one; Mamma, I verily believe, would rather see me dead at her feet than living as a literary woman, so-called. She doesn't say much for fear of rousing the Arles obstinacy, but she intends my future to be Marriage!

We each consider our ideal compatible with the ideal of

the other. She doesn't mind my playing at authorship, if she could be sure it would stop there. I have no objection to playing at marriage, if it wouldn't interfere with the serious work of my life. Literature is to be treated as a hobby. Now, marriage would more or less represent a hobby to me, and not such an interesting one as the other. In the very nature of things it can't be regarded as a business; it is, as yet, the only uncharted, unscheduled occupation in the world. Proficiency in it is a matter of accident; while proficiency in art can be attained by hard work and "pegging away" at lines that won't come right. One can't exactly peg away at marriage!

"Writing," to her, is a kind of by-path that you stroll down when you are tired of the broad and dusty highway of "Going out." How I hate the everlasting round, the daily drive somewhere to see somebody! It is a bad habit of using other people's houses as neutral meeting grounds, using other people's servants, eating other people's food, dancing to other people's bands with other people's men—until you succeed in wiling them away and making them your own. Nearly every man you meet belongs, in the first place, to somebody. . . . Rarely do you meet an unattached man.

But Mother thinks they are all waiting for me to throw the handkerchief to them. I have given society a fair trial, to please Mother, doing that brain-fagging task, two things at once, leading a dreary double life. From the Marriage Mart I come back to my aery in the top of our house and write deep and long and far into the night. No wonder Mother's cronies nod at her disapprovingly over the tops of crowds at receptions, and whisper when they get near her, and have exchanged the usual salutations:

"How bored and uninterested dear Venice does look! Why, her eyes are half shut!"

So they are. I am generally half asleep.

Then Mother says to Lady This or That (that doesn't like her much and is longing to have a chip at her):

"Well good-night, dear, we have to be going on." And "Dear" raises her eyebrows and remarks sarcastically, "To bed, I should hope?" with a stare at the circles under the eyes.

Mother doesn't turn a hair, but drags off her victim—

"To Norssex House, Danes!" or "The Embassy!" . . .

I make no fuss. Once my neck is in the collar it is as easy to go on as to go out, and proceed to mount a succession of stairs till dawn or thereabouts, when Mother "lets up" out of sheer fatigue and we stumble into our own house and up our own stairs. By that time I am past sleep, and just get into a tea-gown and sit by the window and write my very soul out.

Mother has come at last to admit that I am not a success at it. She tells Audely Bar and Lily St. Just (to whom she always pours out all her woes and my affairs; I don't exactly know why) that it is heart rending to take Venice about; that her beauty (?) doesn't make its hit because I put my clothes on carelessly and take such care to give the impression that I am bored. So I am bored, but that explanation does not occur to Mother. She remembers her ten years of chaperonage of Ilsa, who simply loved, does love, going out.

Mother tells Lily that I always begin by attracting men, but can't keep it up. The "White Snowdrop"—Mother's name for me, and that is only anæmia—wins them and chills them, and they go away to find some one with a worse complexion, perhaps, but livelier. Bohemia doesn't find me dull, but it is merely deplorable waste of time to fascinate Rowley Deane, so that he asks if he may paint me in squares, or Willie Wilmot, so that he writes and dedicates *vers libres* to me. She regards it as an insult that he doesn't take the trouble to make them rhyme!

And Bohemia isn't allowed to get me too cheap. Rowley Deane is permitted to paint me because a portrait when exhibited is an advertisement to both artist and sitter—more to the artist of course. But Gareth Llewellyn and Willie Wilmot, whose poems haven't found a publisher yet, but are only handed round in the set, are asked now and again to crushes. I am not allowed to go to parties at the Leahys', ostensibly, but I do, and it is there I meet most of these nice people. I am forced to take Effel—not that I mind—and so it is her duty to see I don't get into any messes. She has to keep Them off me. Mother imagines them as a kind of hairy, unwashed octopus, stretching out tentacles to absorb me all the time. As a matter of fact they are not so keen on me as Mother imagines. They think me a nice clever little girl with possibilities of doing something some day if my people don't stifle it. . . .

So, you see, in spite of my moral emancipation, the greater part of my existence is spent in wandering about in a restricted area of souls, who are of Us, and All Right, meeting their dull, boring, shooting, sporting men who never talk of what is likely to interest me and whom I therefore can't interest back, although I try. Indeed I do, to please Mother, and it is very dispiriting, when we get back from three hours or so spent in this dreary *milieu*, to see her fling her cloak at Berrymore with a despairing gesture, and cry aloud:

“Who would be a Mother?”

I feel inclined to say, “Why do you?” for of course I know she means taking me out.

If I do marry, and I suppose I shall some day, I hope I shall profit by this object lesson and leave my daughters to work out their life problems by themselves.

For Mother is “working it” for me exactly as she did for Ilsa, and Ilsa is her failure. I wish she would be like the general who learned from his failures, but I suppose that is too much to expect from any one so old fashioned.

Not that Ilsa is a failure, from my point of view at all.

They think in the family that I know nothing of Ilsa and her life and present position. As a matter of fact, in my sister's interests, I have worked out her problem thoroughly and mastered every detail of her career. I don't get the information from Mother or Ilsa or you; you are all so very reticent about the family skeleton, as I think you call poor Ilsa, don't you? No! I try to pick Lucy's brains during the intervals of my Latin lessons, telling him that I consider it a pious duty, now that I have attained unto years of discretion, to know the worst that is said about my elder sister. I learn from poor old Lucy's reticences more than from anything else; he is fearfully gentlemanly, and hasn't the remotest idea that he is giving Ilsa away. And no more he is. What he knows everybody does, you included. I love Ilsa, and as her best friend I don't choose to be left out of her affairs by you elders. I mean with regard to what people say about her; her feelings, and deeds even, are her own affair, and I wouldn't for anything pry into them.

But I gather that she is supposed to be a regular buccaneer, and has just followed her instincts wherever they led her, all over the place; that she has made Europe into one vast *cabinet particulier*, or flirtation paddock, let us say, using all

her advantages—Papa's being accredited at three Foreign Courts enabling her to meet anybody she set her heart on—using people's vulgar servility to help her to cover up her tracks, and even Mother's family *esprit de corps* to that end. Whenever she thought she wanted a man, she just took him, no matter what, wherever, and whoever he was. I am aware that they call her Dolores, Our Lady of Pain, and "The Dashed White Butterfly," and "The Venetian Bead"—the man you sent over, Cyrus P. Something, started that quite mild nickname in comparison with some which have been fixed on my wretched sister.

You mustn't blame Lucy; all I get out of him is *volens volens*—by sheer persistence. I moither him till he lets things out. He adores Ilsa, and so does Effel. Ilsa is her own worst enemy. She abuses and nicknames herself. The other day when I was reading aloud to her she said she was like La Vallière, who retired to a convent and was made abbess of it. Ilsa is a little lame like her. And another day, looking at the portrait of Louise de la Querouaille, created Duchess of Portsmouth, she said that in any state that was properly run she would have produced an heir and had a dukedom created for him. But that in this benighted country she was only an anachronism and a tragedy.

If you were to see our poor dear Messalina lying on her bed, and smoking in a simple white rest-gown on hot afternoons, while I read to her and make sherbet on the washstand, stirring it up with a tooth-brush, you would realize that half of the talk is lies and jealousy, and half her own reckless self. Of course she is bitter—who wouldn't be, with every woman's hand against her, though she never was unkind in her flirtations? She hardly ever took husbands away from devoted wives. She made inquiries first, I suppose.

Then they will have it that she is nearly always tipsy—drunk as I prefer to call it. That is nonsense; I've never seen her. She is often depressed and can't sleep, and then she takes drops which are lowering, and then I dare say she wants stimulants to pick her up if she is going out.

One of the special charms of Ninon de L'Enclos (whom by the way I have always considered one of the most desirable personages in history, though she herself said that if she had it to begin over again she had rather have been

hung, and I dare say Ilsa would say the same); was that she was, as they said, *ivre dès la soupe*, not from wine, for she never touched it, but from sheer drunkenness of company. And—I suppose I hardly ought to write the word, yet I know you know—they do say that Ilsa is venal, just like Ninon, and Ninon, though she lived by it, took her lovers for love, and nothing else sometimes.

In these days people don't really do these wild things, and it is sheer nonsense to suppose that Ilsa isn't as modern and decent as every one else when it comes to the point. Still I wish she would not take presents, even from shops. But she would go mad if she hadn't the reputation of being the best dressed woman in London. She has to compass that, somehow, and of course one knows that Mother couldn't afford to dress her in the way she is turned out now. And Mother swears that she cannot ask Papa to pay heavy bills for Ilsa any more, now that she doesn't seem to intend to marry.

I don't believe that. Mother rubbed that idea into me, *re* myself the other day, just to make an impression. She said Papa said—but I don't for one moment believe Papa's mind works on such squalid lines.

And you must remember that most of Ilsa's things are the reward of advertisement.

It is wonderful how clothes and soaps and scents and stays and so on tumble like ripe plums into Ilsa's lap in response to a letter written in her broad scrawling hand that attracts the eye. Lady Ilsa St. Remy says that she uses such and such a soap and no other, or finds such and such a make of corset the most comfortable she has ever worn. She is kept in cosmetics and groceries, but what of that? Friends complain of her carelessness sometimes. Ida says the gloves Ilsa recommended split all the way down the first time you put them on, and that the soap she says in print is so excellent for the complexion took all the skin off her and the bath too.

She has so many friends that give her tips, and tell her where to go for furs and jewellery, of which she has bought some beautiful bits for herself. That last string of pearls—she has three—is splendid. People in the know can of course help her to get these things cost-price, or tell her where to pick them up, which comes much cheaper than if

she attempted to get them through the ordinary channels. And every one knows that pearls are an investment.

The concomitant of all this is a rather disagreeable one. It means that so many of Ilsa's friends are in business, big shopkeepers and manufacturers, and a good many of them—the men who give her the money tips—Jews. And we have to have them here a good deal, or Mother thinks so. Ilsa never raises a finger to get them invited. But I fancy Mother's idea of a valid and respectable *quid pro quo* is admitting them to the hospitalities of Park Crescent and giving them the chance of saying that they have been there, and that may be some good to them! She never will ask the wives if she can help it, and most of them are the kind of people who don't mind, seemingly.

So, when once Mother has invited Mr. Stanley Jehoshaphat to one of our popular dinners, or given Mr. Blackley the run of our crushes, she feels quite content, imagining she is being a kind of Iphigenia to Ilsa, saving her from the necessity of fulfilling her obligations to these awful people. It leads to *pas mal* of family discussion. Our own people, of the elder generation, don't fancy meeting outsiders like this. Great Aunt Witley-and-Stoke tells Aunt Minna that Beaty Arles is betraying her order, and adds spitefully, *re* Ilsa, that she knows quite well why she does it. Any way she, Mariquita Witley-and-Stoke, the daughter of the Duc de Medinadel-Campo, won't countenance her sordid tricks by coming to anything here but a dinner of which she has scrutinized the list of guests. Lady Witley-and-Stoke is eighty-five, so Mother can indulge her whim without seeming too servile.

I have nothing to do with the invitations. Effel and Mother do them. But I always suppose it is this sort of tit-for-tat which accounts for some of the faces and figures I see at our big crushes, and is the reason my Mother and Ilsa permit themselves to treat them like dirt.

I must tell you what happened to Ida Leahy at the wedding of one of the Darcy cousins. Hector Mackenzie, that Hermy married, has a place in Skye, and Mother wants us to stay there often. So she let Hermy be married from our house, and gave a breakfast for her and showed her presents. Hermione Darcy is rather like Mother, you know: strictly utilitarian; and though she hates Mother's crowd, liked it better than an hotel. Ida's story is that when she had

arrived at the drawing-room, cross with fighting her way upstairs and prepared to be jarred by everything she saw, she had got hold of Ilsa and remarked loudly :

“ Lady Ilsa, I’ve come upstairs behind a fat man that, if it wasn’t your house, I should have sworn was Blackley ! ”

Ilsa told her that it *was* Blackley, and that if she were to look on the second table to the right of the drawing-room door she’d see a set of coffee spoons he’d given Hermy, who, as I have told you, is just like Mother, and doesn’t look to see where things come from if they’re good.

Ida was much shocked. Really Mr. Blackley was the thick end of the wedge. I think Mother should not have allowed even Hermy Mackenzie to sell her soul for a set of coffee spoons. My family guilt weighed on me, so that when Mr. Blackley came up and beamed, I could not find it in my heart to say a word to him before Ida, who knew Mother was too busy that day ; Ilsa too much occupied with a new millionaire, to speak to him, and fear he had a dull afternoon. As for the bride, she was not even introduced to him. I rather wished I had made an effort for the honour of the family when I heard later that he had provided the whole of the breakfast, which was remarkably good, especially some *foie gras pâté* that Ida and I, wedged at one time in the crowd in front of a small section of buffet, completely demolished between us. It was a dream ! So if poor Mr. Blackley’s *quid pro quo* was merely to be asked to the breakfast he had provided and not even be introduced to the lady to whom he had given an expensive wedding present out of his own shop, I do think he was treated badly.

Mother’s system of *quid pro quo* suits me well enough. I invite the people I like, and Mother asks those *she* wants. Unfortunately it is all for me both ways. We generally invite Mrs. Lee-Gray, who makes all my clothes. Mother concocts hers with a little dressmaker who works here for half a crown a day, and who always makes skirts a couple of inches too short in front. But Effel says that it’s no matter what she wears, Lady Arles looks every inch the countess.

I happen to know, through the Family Filter, as I call Lucy, that Effel considers me selfish, greedy, and vain. Lucy adores Effel and Effel adores Mother, and they are both agreed that since Mother exists only for me, I ought



to exist only for her. I agree with them in the main, and one can't be annoyed with either Effel or Lucy, they are such institutions. I call them Swift and Stella: Swift was a tutor. . . .

Lucy isn't so much against me as Effel; he has a sneaking respect for me because I am such a good pupil and he can get me on far faster than he did poor dear Romanille! I am a poet, he tells Effel, and not an animal, as she tells him. The two are commensurate if they only knew. I shouldn't be so self-indulgent and even greedy if I weren't using up so much force in producing. . . . They will have it that I am incapable of giving love—too selfish—while Ilsa is not selfish enough, and is capable of dying for love, so dear little Lucy says. . . .

The pair are dreadfully concerned about Ilsa and her future, which they consider, as I do, that she still has to play with. They get her into Effel's little sanctum and implore her to see her way to accept your invitation—a standing one, isn't it?—to go to you in America, and start a new life. They suggest, that having exhausted the Old World—I should rather think so—she should try the New. They predict that she would take it by storm. Would she, dear thing? . . . I wonder! . . . Still, though she loves you and wants badly to see you again, she always jibs at making the plunge. Sometimes I think it is just that lazy stay-at-home, cat-like feeling she has so strongly—*laisser-aller*, *laisser-faire*, the root of all her misfortunes. Or else it is love of me. We do love each other very much indeed, and Mother and Ilsa, though they never quarrel, don't really get on: Ilsa is so scornful about her little pettifogging contrivances for my benefit; and even if she makes no remark, the affected attitude of aloofness she puts on is equally galling to our jolly pirate of a mother. It amuses me, Mother's system. I am far more tolerant and indulgent of her little ways than Ilsa, who refuses to treat Mrs. Lee-Gray, because she makes my dresses cheaper for the privilege, as an old and valued friend, or Mr. Sacristan the photographer, who does me for nothing whenever I am "in face," as a smart man of her own set. Mother has found out and adopted a condescending *bonhomie* which keeps these sort of people in a good humour without actually derogating from her supposed dignity. I don't consider it worth while to make any official difference

between one person or another, and I suppose I keep up my end all right. So does Mother, though one might say she hadn't much *surface* dignity left. She is all right at bottom, and our people know that well enough and just survey her goings on with good-humoured interest, as if she were a canker blossom, say, on our family tree. And there is Mr. Biss (and Boom) Mother's tame publisher, who comes here pretty often to keep Mother up to the mark, *i.e.* writing saleable stuff for him, which apparently she can do, for he is very eager.

Mother's "writing" is rather a joke. She does it for fun, and because it gratifies her vanity to be even with me; but proclaims loudly that she does it, "frankly," for money. Mr. Biss believes her; he says he quite understands that a woman of title would hardly care to write unless it was worth her while.

Well, he certainly doesn't make it worth *our* while, Ida's and mine, for it takes all my time and hers to pull Mother's grammar into line, and send up a decently corrected proof, and poor Effel spends hours typing her articles for her. Mr. Biss has a good deal of trouble in getting her to stick to her province, which is undoubtedly the opinions and sayings and doings of the British Aristocracy, and keep her off Theosophy. Mother hankers so after expressing her views on the chances of a future life, working up little smatterings of pseudo-science she picks up from Audely.

I encourage her to get Ida's help, because, after accepting it, she can hardly refuse to invite her to our parties. She does, hardly concealing her notion that it is Ida who is profiting by contact with a Countess. Ida, you see, is a thorough woman of the world, and doesn't mind Mother a bit: she is immensely amused by her arrogance and glad to be with me on any terms. Besides, she happens to have a high opinion of Mother; admires her splendid and vital energy, her real altruism, submerged under family feeling and racial pride which she considers picturesque and comparatively harmless.

And Audely Bar looks over our contracts—mine and Mother's—and won't let Mr. Biss (and Boom) cheat us, though he is very fond of getting one or the other of us penned in the back drawing-room, and then drawing a moving picture of a publisher's difficulties, in order to make us see the propriety of taking less for an article or guaranteeing so many copies of a book,

My volume of poems is coming out in the autumn. Mr. Biss says it is a great risk, but he'll take it, and he hopes that the title will sell a certain number of copies. . . . I smile in my beard, for I happen to know that after forbidding me to guarantee fifty copies, as Mr. Biss wished me to do, getting it out of my own slender allowance, Audely had gone behind my back and promised Biss that he would agree to take a hundred and fifty himself, which is really what guaranteeing means. Mr. Biss doesn't think I know. I know it through Ida, who swears it is a fact, though Audely has not told her in so many words.

It is very nice of Audely, and as he can easily afford it I shan't stop him. I shall get all his copies to give away to my friends.

My forthcoming *début* as an authoress worries Mother a good deal, as one knows it would. She looks upon it in the light of opening the stable door wide and letting the mettled steed—me—walk out, perhaps to stay out—in Bohemia. I did once, to tease her, hint that I contemplated living in a Ladies' Hostel, or becoming a paying guest of the Leahys or even of Meg Twells. These idle threats now boomerang back on my head. I had to get Effel to assure Mother that I am not likely to do anything of the kind; that I love my comfort far too much to want to stay in a house where they don't drink and have chairs without backs, or live in a community where they turn out the lights at ten and don't give you a chance to read in bed. Effel was rather a brick, and advised Mother that she had better let me have this literary outlet, to save me from worse. And Audely having thrown his weight into the scale too, the matter of the poems is more or less settled.

## IV

### *From The Lady Venice St. Remy*

PARK CRESCENT.

OH, I am so angry! The system of *quid pro quos* I described to you in my last has broken down, and I must say Mother has surpassed herself in injustice and unfairness. Too stupid of her to drive me to extremities like this! It is a very little thing, but one on which I feel I must make a stand.

I told you I was willing to let Mother run me and take me to dull houses and ask her sort of people to ours, on condition that I was to do the same. And what makes it mean is she doesn't herself object to making use of Ida.

But when I want to perform a small service for Ida, Mother flatly refuses to allow it.

Ida is marrying, quite soon, a perfectly nice clean and well-bred man, Gerald Quain, and wants me to be her bridesmaid. There is not a word to be said against him, even by Mother, except that he has the misfortune to be both an architect and artist, and a Cubic artist to boot, and wears a soft hat and a tan shirt. These things will pass; they are only the trimmings of greatness. Ida always looks nice except for her hair, which she has never learned to "do." Her rowdy locks, as Ilsa calls them, give Mother a handle which she is not slow to take. They are going to have a veil and orange blossoms and vergers, as well as going properly through the ceremony, not leaving out, as refined pigs like Hemy Mackenzie do. It is all a sign, surely, of respectability and grace. And Ida hasn't got any sisters or near relations, so I should control the dresses, which disposes of one set of Mother's fake-objections. Then she started superstition, about a girl who is bridesmaid three times not being a bride. Ilsa has never been a bridesmaid once!

Both Ida and her mother wrote nicely, Mrs. L. especi-

ally. She chose her phrases so well, and her handwriting is small and her e's Greek, not sprawling all over the page like the fist of Mother and her friends. It did impress Mother a little, and rather corrected her desire to be rude, but she managed to be, all the same, and made a fool of herself as well.

She answered at some length, and graciously let Mrs. Leahy into the secret reason for her refusal, *viz.* her impression that I ought to be the bride instead of Ida.

Fake, all fake; the real reason is Ilsa's past, getting into my way as usual. All Mother's tiresomeness comes from her being so upset about my eldest sister, who is a very decent member of society, although unmarried, if only they would leave her alone. And, as Mother had chosen to give me a fake-reason for not allowing me I gave her a fake-promise to get her to allow me to, and I believe it has done the trick, especially if I supplement it with another little *supercherie* which I now consider it quite fair to play off on Mother. She has asked for it.

Ida is very patient about it; says that Lady Arles' bark is worse than her bite, and that there is plenty of time for her to come round. The date of the marriage is not fixed, and can't be just yet, though they say September, until Gerald's picture which is to pay for the wedding tour is finished. They are going to Munich, Ida's dream. Ida is wild about German culture, and Gerald says the first home of Futurism was in Germany. Imagine Gerald and Ida, Ilsa says, stumping about the Pinakothek in sandals and woollen sweaters and soft hats, the woman, as is usual with this type of dress, looking like a bad copy of the man, in clothes just a little softer and more formless. Ilsa is nice, but she can't help jeering a little at my friends, and Mother enjoys it, and it doesn't do Gerald or Ida any harm.

If Mother and Ilsa even knew, they are as proud of their own particular kind of chic as Mother and Ilsa are of theirs. With them it is smart to have harmonious dun knitted waistcoats and well-fitting sandals with digitated stockings to match, and they hunt all over London to get the right kind, just as Mother and Ilsa pursue their special makes of stays and hats. Ida and Gerald, too, jeer at our ways, but are perfectly polite and civil to us as to an equal, though they wouldn't allow us to be rude to them for a moment.

I remember the occasion of Mother's visit to Mrs. Leahy,

early in the stage of my acquaintance with Ida, when Mother was not so afraid of the Leahy connection, and was willing to call once to please me. We went together, and Mrs. Leahy was not in the room. The maid—Mother was surprised to see she kept a maid, who was actually dressed in the afternoon and wore a cap!—the maid “went to fetch her,” and Mother sat down on the sofa. When Mrs. Leahy came in Mother had the cheek to remain sitting while I introduced them, but held out her hand—

I admired the way in which Mrs. Leahy dealt with the situation. She first sat down on the sofa beside her guest and then accepted her outstretched hand. She could not have signified her disapproval, and subsequent condonation for my sake, of Mother’s rudeness better.

We, as a class, don’t in the least grasp their point of view. I do; but I am exceptional. People like Ida and Gerald, who are in the very forefront of civilization, think of Us as a fine picturesque institution bound to go soon, but to be kept up as long as possible. They regard the remains of the feudal system as the hugest joke, but wouldn’t do away with us for the world, so long as we stay where we are till wanted, ready to come out at need and fight for our serfs and their homesteads, according to contract. Gerald indeed always says that the need *will* come; that war must recur, and that then the aristocracy will have to show that it has not forgotten how to lead.

Meanwhile we exist on sufferance; we have our movements recorded in the papers, we contribute the scandals that the busy people who have no time to run away to Paris with other men’s wives or money to lose in horse racing, read out to each other in the evenings.

Mother has the idea that they live in a constant state of struggling up to the Light, and that the only reason Ida wants me to be her bridesmaid is that I may contribute some of that light to the little parlour in Notting Hill! The other bridesmaids are to be three of Ida’s fellow workers in the Girls’ Friendly where she lectures. I wish Mother could realize that it is far less compromising to stand behind Ida with this sort of girl than with second-rate suburban relations!

Mrs. Leahy’s uncle was Herbert Spencer or Mr. Lecky, or some savant whose name I forget. Gerald’s father was a rather famous engineer, whose name also I forget. One

way and another, though, the Leahys, and the Quain family too, have quite a good record, and consider themselves as good as any one else. Their house is properly run, although they don't drink wine and Mrs. Leahy answers the door herself in the mornings. They have proper table napkins, and not paper squares as Mother insists they must have. She said to Ida once that she thought it a good idea, and Ida answered pleasantly that she never could bring herself to eat anything if, when she sat down, she found a wisp of coloured paper stuck in her glass, but that if Lady Arles would give them the pleasure of her company at luncheon one day, she would see that for once her ladyship's suggestion should be carried out.

Our people always think that there's nothing between a Prince and a pauper, for they never come in contact with the rank *immediately* below them. Charity takes them at once to the slums, and even there the window is dressed for them. We see Life always from the best places; we have a seat as a matter of course in the front row of the Grand Stand and extra facilities for seeing what is going on. The People are willing to concede all sorts of privileges in return for the vague *quid pro* of feudal service, which in the present state of the world's civilization we are never likely to be called upon to render.

We gain all along the line. Once from our high places we bossed things, knowing well that we should have our heads cut off if we did it badly, or if the capricious crowd surging below altered its mind and decided that we weren't fit to dominate them, or if we cheated them as Richard II did poor Jack Cade.

Nowadays, if we muddle our jobs, there are no penalties at all—a question asked in the House, and all is quiet again. As for the poor wretches below, they have looked up to us so long that their eyes turn up naturally. Even if we fall and wallow in the gutter, they seem hypnotized into believing that we are still up aloft, like the boy in the Indian juggler's trick who goes up a ladder and is never *seen* to come down again!

And the convenience of it all! I have relations all over the world, in every Embassy. I am always having packages left me by King's messengers. I received a lovely Kaf-Kas belt from that big shop in St. Petersburg the other day, a present from Aunt Catherine. She is going to give me a winter over there as soon as I care to leave London. But

there's time enough to go to Russia when we've exhausted Rome, which I mean to aim at for the winter. If we go abroad, we slide straight into everything. The year I was going to be eighteen, and hadn't been presented, we went to Rome quite suddenly. It didn't matter, because Mother was a peeress. If I had been the daughter of a commoner—even of the Prime Minister—I shouldn't have been able to go to parties at the Embassy. And we take precedence even in rescue, like the Blois girls in the Grantham railway accident. Hetty Blois told me how they were attended to first, and escorted out of the upturned railway carriage before every one else.

The reverse of the medal for Mother is that a title makes all your bills bigger and doesn't prevent your having to pay them in the end, like any other commoner. And you ought, but you don't, tip porters higher if you have your name stamped on your boxes. But I should like to see Mother hampered by her title! She insists on all its privileges and gets round most of its obligations if she can. She delights in putting on clothes that Berrymore would not have at a gift, and, leaving off her gold pince-nez and the diamond and turquoise enamelled watch that belonged to Marie Antoinette and was given her by the Duc de Morny, goes off in a taxi, which she dismisses at Aldgate Pump, to the market at Middlesex Street on a Sunday morning. A silver cross, made of old Bible clasps, that she sold to Mrs. Levy in Sloane Street for three times what she gave for it, and some excellent Lachs in a paper bag, was what she brought back last time.

Our title gives us the right to insult people when it is convenient to us, not excepting our own friends. And it is in my interests, too, that Mother abrogates the very laws of hospitality. Did I ever tell you about the small and early Mother gave once? (N.B. Mother bases her excuse on the word Early.) She declared after the event, and after she had done what she wanted to do, and offended every single one of our friends who didn't know what she was capable of, that Early on a card means that the hostess reserves to herself the right to keep a supper engagement, if she happens to have already contracted one. The engagement to sup at the Ritz was contracted afterwards; not that that would stop my jesuitical mother from using the excuse, plus her notion that the Arles can do as they like.



I didn't realize until afterwards what Mother was up to, though I had seen Mr. Van Pomp's letter, asking Mother and me to supper at the Ritz to meet—some foreign title or other, or was it the Russian Dancers? Ilsa was away in Paris with Miss Twells, the Fashions editor of *The Beauty's Friend* that Mr. Johosphat subsidizes for Ilsa and Meg Twells. And even if Ilsa had been there she wouldn't have interfered, but just shrugged her shoulders and said that for her part she was ready for bed, and that they must all come again another day, as you say to a party of children when you break them up forcibly. Ilsa works colossal impertinence better than Mother, when she once begins.

The invitation had come, I will swear, two or three hours after Effel had got all our cards written and posted. I rather wondered why Mother, having read the invitation, took it so calmly and tucked away the card as if it didn't concern her any more, for I knew her views for me with Mr. Van Pomp, and I knew too that he was rather sour and savage, and thinking himself too rich to be snubbed even by a Countess, would probably not ask Mother again unless she came at his first nod, *i.e.* the first time he invited her.

About ten o'clock that evening the drawing-room and boudoir were full. We always ask too many people. I hate it. I like having elbow room, and not people rubbing against my sleeves. Every one was talking, with voices raised the way people will do when the standard of screaming has been set. Miss Takaresco was just going to sing again, one of her Rumanian folk songs that take so long to sing. No one was thinking of going for another hour. I had heard Crookes telling the first people to be set down that carriages were ordered at ten-thirty, and I thought it very officious of him, and meant to tell Mother next day if I could remember. He is such a very old servant that he is apt to take the law into his own hands and consult his own inclinations, and Crookes is always ready for bed.

Audely Bar was there, interested in Miss Takaresco, whom he had picked up in a cabaret in Jassy and advised and assisted with money to come over and try her fortune in London. She wanted to sing here for nothing, as he was a friend of Mother's, but he wouldn't let her. He is paying her fee, so I understood from Mother, who thought it quite a nice arrangement that Audely Bar should pay the expenses of our entertainments! But if he did it in order

to make Mother feel bad—it didn't. He was playing host, as he generally does at our parties, for Papa has to go to bed at nine, because of his phlebitis.

Mother was, if anything, less restless than usual.

Suddenly she tilted up her chin, by which I knew that she wanted to speak to me. I passed into the little narrow passage leading into the morning-room. It was empty, although the room through was full of people. Mother told me, in there, speaking loudly, although she fancied she was whispering, that she had ordered the carriage at 10·45, and it was now waiting for us. We were to slip away without anybody noticing, under cover of the song which was just beginning. I was utterly bewildered, just as I was on the night of the fire in Portman Square and Effel couldn't persuade me to move out of my little safe bedroom after the alarm had been given because of the smoke that was puffing in, in dense rolls and folds. My legs seemed paralysed then, but this time it was my intelligence that was benumbed and my manners in abeyance. But still, what could I do? She wouldn't have scrupled to pinch my arm to make me come, or drag at me and make a scene. She murmured something about a Royal command . . . or was it that Mr. Van Pomp had got Royalty coming? . . . Any way we got downstairs quietly, and Berrymore was waiting in an angle of the landing with our wraps. . . .

As we went past him I heard Mother whisper something to Audely. I understood her to say that she expected him to see everybody out of the house without panic or disorder, telling them if necessary where their hostess had gone—Royal Command!—but if they didn't happen to notice, letting them just fade away naturally.

He nodded and said Yes, he would be very gentle with the shorn lambs, or something of the sort. Irony is lost on Mother when she has her mind set on anything, and downstairs we went. Audely didn't seem at all *émotionné*; he is used to my dear mother. Indeed every one is, more or less, and people seemed—some of them—to realize that she was shunting them for something better, and made a sort of move even as we went downstairs.

I noticed people, our friends, pushing past us as if we were only guests like themselves. That was the humour of it. I fancy one or two of the intimates were anxious both to show their sense of Mother's rudeness and get on early to the

next party, as well. It was the height of the season. Some of them even managed to get out of the house before we did. The last thing I saw as we got into the carriage was Audely Bar, looking very weird and nice with the electric light shining on his yellow hair, as he stood at the top of our long straight staircase that you can see the whole length of from outside the door, speeding the departing guests.

"That's all right!" Mother said, with a full sigh as she subsided on to the cushions.

It was a hint that she had been a little concerned about it, and considered she had carried through a difficult job. We rolled along towards Piccadilly and I kept up a sturdy silence, so as to mark my sense of reprobation. I wanted her to understand, that for once, I *did* really think that we had strained our aristocratic privilege too far. But it was no good. Mother has the hide of a Spanish bull, and I don't believe the cleverest toreador could plant a banderillo in it that would stick or hurt, except perhaps Audely.

You say in one of your letters that you would like to be told something about Audely Bar, as he seems to be always in the house. Quite true, he is here a good deal, except when he isn't, and then he is very much away—in Bosnia, or Madrid, where he has a house, or Burmah, where he shoots, and so on. We don't hear of him for months, and then suddenly he comes home and takes his place by our fire as if he had never left it. Every one regards him as Mother's property, though as a matter of fact Ilsa first brought him to the house, got bored with him because she found he couldn't flirt, and turned him over to Mother.

He isn't in love with Mother; he isn't in love with any one. He'd sooner have a place on a woman's hearthrug than in her heart: Mother's hearthrug for choice. He is the tame cat, though he's more like a fish: a nice cold scaly fish, that steers about in a tank all day by the rudder of its tail, and stares at you out of an abstracted eye, as it swims past. The fish metaphor is helped by the fact that he wears his mouth slightly open. Mother, who is out to kill Romance, even with her own Audely, says it is because he suffered from adenoids in his youth.

And yet, in his fishy way I do believe Audely loves Mother more than anybody in the world.

What takes him is of course the contrast between her

energy and his supineness. He is too lazy to protest, at the time, when she makes him perform all sorts of absurd tasks for her, but when it is suddenly too much for him he gets up and goes away—a very long way away. Once he stayed abroad for a year, sometimes it is half a year, generally it is a couple of months. Mother doesn't pine for him too obviously, but when she wants somebody to write a lawyer's letter for her, or draw up a new codicil to her will, or do a bit of diplomacy—generally getting something cheap—or even settle a tiresome bill, she sighs and says, "I wish to goodness Audely Bar was here to deal with it!"

He does not come to heel at once, even when he does come back, but sometimes waits quite a long time before he signifies that he is ready to resume his duties. Sometimes, when I am out with Mother, I see Audely flash by in an open taxi, and he waves to me as much as to say, "See you soon!"

"Mother," I say, "there's Audely!" and while she is fumbling with her pince-nez he is out of sight. And if he doesn't turn up within a day or two she will have it that I am mistaken—I am not; I have a royal memory for faces.

She is awfully fond of Audely, not only because he is rich. She says he is so loyal and true to her. She need never be jealous, except perhaps of some of the numerous Committees he has put his name on, and that is because the horrid impersonal things get so much money out of him, and Mother naturally wants to be the only one to do that.

Once he gave her a lesson. I often laugh over it. I heard it from Berrymore; Mother never, of course, said a word. When we had Beardmore, you know, we were eight miles from the station, and had to send in for stores and to meet people who were coming to stay. Mother was pleased when they said they preferred to walk or come on a bicycle, and let their luggage come by carrier. Audely sometimes walked and sometimes not.

Once, then, when he was coming and had to be met as he had hurt his foot, Mother chose not to send in the cart as usual. She had got a scheme in which Audely was to help her. She had a great case of stores down from the Army and Navy, and it was at the station waiting for her to send in for it.

The dog-cart would not be able to deal with anything so large, and she was having a row with the man who had the only lorry in Beardmore village, and was putting him in

Coventry to make him more civil. So she sent Dawkin's great landau to meet Audely and put it down to him. Dawkin always takes the opportunity of charging a pound for the landau, as it is so very seldom out.

The joke was, that Audely used the landau to come on to Beardmore in, paid the driver, and left the case behind!

That was a lesson for Mother.

But he gives us anything we seem to hanker after and cannot afford at the time. His presents are always just what one likes. He gave Ilsa a gorgeous barbaric charm-thing that he had had made especially for her. Ilsa always wears it. She loves it. She says it is her only innocent trinket.

He is away just now—in Bosnia. Mother wants him over the arrangements for taking the house in Scotland; that is where we shall finally settle, I believe. She has had to manage all that herself, and when he comes back she is sure to make it a grievance with him if anything has gone wrong about it. On the whole, life is pleasanter when Audely is here to give Mother lunches and dinners when there is a domestic crisis, and lend us his man when we want him, and buy Mother the thing she pretends she cannot afford to get for herself. I've known Audely take up a servant's character for Mother and dismiss her when she wouldn't do. Oh yes, he is her mainstay, but I am bound to say he takes it out in insulting her. He does it in such a quiet, affectionate way that she never resents it; she can't, it is so wrapped up; but by that means he contrives to get off the most awful speeches to her.

She just looks helpless for the moment and then returns breezily to her point, whatever it is, showing plainly that his criticisms haven't affected her in the least. The truth is, she doesn't like to be made to think. Papa never did try, and that is why they got on so well together, always. We now and then try to make her look ahead a little, but we only bore her, and Audely's clever generalizations are miles over her golden head, as he says fondly.

I love them. Audely is most amusing, though he once wrote a dull book, which is odd, considering he says *des choses à faire frémir* in a still small voice. He is much too proud to say what he means, ever; anybody can do that. He never talks facts. But his theories are lovely and wild, and light, as they say of cakes. I often tell him he is like

Shelley's Cloud, an elemental, rather watery spirit who floats in the empyrean and has chosen to shed facts to get rid of ponderability. He can tell fortunes by your palm and mend violins and compose songs, sing a little, and do conjuring tricks. He knows astrology and has told our horoscopes. I am what he calls a Scorpio person—a degenerate, and shall most likely die mad.

He makes all these wild statements with a perfectly grave face, and Mother gets so angry. *Me* a crank! Ilsa the only person in the house who isn't!

Ida and Gerald know Audely, and like him. He is rather fond of Mrs. Leahy, too, but we daren't tell Mother that, for it would upset her. Or that he goes there often, and talks philosophy with her. He can't with Mother. He is present at every meeting in their house if he is in town, and goes to supper there occasionally. I go too sometimes, but I never say; it is not worth while. It puts a nice new face on Audely to meet him on neutral ground. Ida thinks he has a great brain and would do something if he were put to it, but that as it is, with a good income and no ties (what about the lady in Madrid and the jointures he has to keep up? But Ida has never heard of a jointure), she says he will just drift through life, attending scrupulously to his own comfort and Mother's and mine and any one's who seems to expect it of him.

In Germany, last year, Audely acted as courier. Anything about travelling that Audely doesn't know, or any language or even patois he doesn't speak! In little places like Treves he was excellent; at Nauheim, of course, where everybody speaks English, he got us into the inner ring of German officers. If I had only not been a fool and attended to Fräulein more I should have had much more fun out of them. As it was, my bad German appears to have insulted these people continually.

There was a Count Le Löffel whom I tolerated. One must tolerate somebody in those sort of places or one is bored to death. And he pursued me, being always at my side, to Mother's satisfaction. He was a frivolous young ass, though a German, and was at Nauheim for his heart. He had strained that mighty organ at Potsdam, playing polo before the Kaiser, whose favourite officer he was. Mother really began to think that if she played her cards well,

she might leave me behind in Germany, with the Kaiser to pull my ears and shut me up in the house if I disobeyed my husband, as I hear he does to the insubordinate wives of men about the Court. She used to be very much annoyed when Ilsa, to tease, told her that Le Löffel had his hand on his sword hilt all the time I was talking to him, as we sat around one of those little coggly tables in the Kur Haus. I was trying to convey to Le Löffel that German officers had no respect for women, and that one of them had actually pushed me off the pavement at Wiesbaden because he wanted me to walk in the gutter, and I wouldn't for him.

“Na, Na, gnädiges Fraülein!” and his blue eyes flashed.

I said that everybody knew that German officers thought themselves the only thing that mattered in Germany, and were brutal on principle to all women and civilians because they would be of no use on *Der Tag*. I don't know how I got hold of that catchword; I suppose I heard them saying it. Audely explained me to Le Löffel, and explained Le Löffel to me, that he himself didn't mind my saying that *all* German officers had a contempt for women, but that *a* German officer had been wanting in respect to *me*.

I dropped Le Löffel later on, when he was naïve enough to ask me to procure him an introduction to a girl who was staying in our hotel. He said she had a neat face and pretty feet. She wore shoes with black bows, and they were always properly tied and never came undone. Mine do occasionally. Ilsa says that I should by now have been Her Excellency Hoch Wohl Geborene if I hadn't let the Count, with his passion for tidiness, see me sitting for two hours at Sticker Bakker Mühle's where we all went for tea, with my blouse undone three buttons and a half at the back. I did not know it was—I never feel draughts—until an old grand duchess, who had developed a great *schwärm* for me, came quietly up behind me as I sat, and did it up with her own fair fat fingers.

People over here always seem to me to imagine German officers as beefy, good-humoured, and blonde, but I maintain that they are as a rule dour and sinister, and undersized; and though they have large ears, have horrid wasp waists. I believe some of them wear stays. Nothing but stays could give the little bite-in, in the grey paletots just over the hip bone, which used to sicken me, I don't know why. It looked so morbid and degenerate. Some of the older ones

had big handsome cloaks, with high upstanding collars trimmed with gold galloon, which they used to fling over their shoulders as they made their way to their mess-table in the inner room of the hotel at Treves. The cloaks seemed to be going to flick us and the dishes off the table, but much they cared! . . . Their arrogance was beastly. Every little humble soldier had to jump up and salute even when half way through a drink, so that the beer ran out of the corners of his mouth. Up on their feet in a minute—they were! This hideous exaggerated discipline! . . . Thank God we don't have it here.

Once at Hildesheim, when the restaurant was full of officers, we walked up and down outside for an hour till there was room for us. There was no question of our getting a bite or even being let in till they were done. This was their time. I peeped under the blind once or twice, being hungry, to see how they were getting on, although Audely reproved me for doing it, and all I could see was feet and swords lying along the floor. The rest of them was cut off by the blind-rod. You seem to be looking at an arsenal.

These men treated us all with the utmost contempt, in spite of our titles. We used to go out to tea gardens, especially to a very charming one near Treves at the end of a rather long walk. That was made up to one by the excellent tea they provided, the *Pflaum kuchen* and *Sand torte*, and all the lovely cakes Germans have.

We sat at little deal tables on the green, and all the German officers and their wives and sweethearts used to drive out there from Treves by the road we had trudged with the other civilians, across the "Dead Councillor." That was the name of the hill. We might have driven too, but Ilsa made us walk because she is afraid of getting fat. They sat there at their ease, talking very little to their Gemählin, abstracted or sulky, with their swords trailing on the grass. It used to make me shiver. I always do at the thought of knives. They most of them had brought their dogs—nice dogs, especially Great Danes. I always talk to a dog, and owners are generally flattered; these men were not, but the reverse. They used to turn round surlily, or not at all, and call their dogs to heel, as if my touch would have corrupted the animals. It was odd and annoying, for one isn't used to being snubbed like that. I believe the Germans hate us!



## V

### *From The Lady Arles*

LOCHROYAN HALL, BERWICKSHIRE.

WE only got in here a few days ago, and I have had such a shock! I must tell you at once what has happened.

I had evidence before I left that Venice has been conducting a clandestine correspondence.

At least one is only a flower in a letter, but goodness knows how many more there are, or have been, and I thought Venice was so above and away from that kind of thing! One has got used to Ilsa and her shifty arrangements, interviews, and whisperings, and messenger boys with notes on the doorstep all day long, but the idea of Venice having an intrigue of that kind never once entered my head. I was always reproaching her for being so standoffish and keeping men at a really indiscreet distance: enough to drive them away altogether, I mean. Girls pretend they detest and abhor the other sex and want to enter convents, and only go out into Society because every one else of their age does, and they've not much else to do to pass the time, but they don't think of the fatigue to a mother involved in racketing about day and night from roof to roof in the season with a bored-looking creature, who all the time is getting involved and keeping things back from her mother.

It was Effel (who has all along had rather a down on my Venice, because of her partiality for Ilsa, whom she thinks, but dares not say, that I neglect, and have done all along for the sake of my younger child) who worked me up to making a domiciliary visit. She came to me in the morning-room, saying that she would never think of reading a letter that was not intended for her, but that in tidying up Venice's writing table she had come on an envelope with an obviously male superscription, and a letter. Though it was only a typewritten sheet, she was able from its appearance to be sure that it was not a portion of manuscript. Besides,

Venice has never so far tried her hand at prose; it is always poetry with her; and even *vers libre* looks like poetry.

Effel is so unused to thinking of Venice as a person who could be receiving love letters that a few words in this one, catching her eye, frightened her to death. The letter went over the page, and she was too honest to turn it over and look for the signature. So she came to me with a long, long face and said she "only thought it right to tell me"—you know the way they begin! I hesitated long before infringing my daughter's rights of privacy, and said I wouldn't touch a paper of hers unless I consulted Ilsa first. If Audely had been at home, I should certainly have consulted him, and there would have been a pretty kettle of fish!

Ilsa, when consulted, backed Effel, plus some spitefulness. She wondered if her sister would not, after all, turn out not to have been so different from other girls. Perhaps I should find that the White Snowdrop had not stood out from the fun any more than the roses and hollyhocks! Venice once called Ilsa a great bouncing hollyhock of a woman, and I see it has rankled.

But all this sort of talk frightened me, I confess, and made me give into her whim that I should just see what the letter was, more or less, about. Ilsa is ten years older than Venice, and has flirted from her cradle, and she seemed to wish to imply that Venice, starting a bit later, might come to the same thing in the end. Now Ilsa's flirtations are undoubtedly going to land her in old maidhood, and though she makes light of her failure to marry, and pretends to be content with her court of old fogies and young boys, I shouldn't like my little Venice to forfeit marriage and children—the only normal thing, whatever a fox without a tail may say. Venice must marry, must have a child or two; one a boy, for the sake of the race. Alas, that he could not take the title Romanille, for we are the last of us! The best that can happen now is for the house of Arles to be carried on in the female line. The blood will be there, though not the pretty titles. . . .

Ilsa finished my opposition by adding that if I had seen fit in the past to supervise *her* correspondence, been more drastic with her generally, it would have been as well. You know, Laura, it was never my way. Aunt Witley-and-Stoke was always at me about it. I never looked over the addresses of your letters, or your programmes even. And

in your case it turned out all right ; you were plainer and steadier, and never gave me any trouble, but Ilsa was out of my control before she had been presented a month ! Butter wouldn't melt in her mouth till then, and her little mouth was as round as a button. Well, she has made up for it since ! And her to turn round and abuse me for not being particular with her !

Well, the long and the short of it was that I crept to the poor child's room like a thief in the night, at a time when it had been ascertained that she would be miles away, in Theobald's Road, reading her poetry to the Poetry Bookshop.

Her poor queer room, that I think hideous ! It seemed pathetic now in the light of what I was up to. Ilsa's room is all flowery and bowery, with roses and paroquets perching among them. Rather French, you know, like a picture by Lancret. Venice's is most comfortless, by her own wish ; no servant would put up with it. It is copied from the room of the Princess in a picture by Carpaccio ; hardly furnished at all. There is just a narrow little bed you can't turn in, and a little mirror you can't see yourself in, and a washstand that I should say you couldn't wash in, though Venice seems to manage. There's nothing else in the room but a mediaeval *escritoire* bureau thing where there wouldn't be room, Ilsa remarked, for the D. for Dear in one of *my* letters.

Well, it pleases her, for the present, but it strikes me as a poor substitute for a husband. And on the *escritoire* I found what they said I should find. I can't exactly say that you could have knocked me down with a feather, for I'm solid on my feet, but I suddenly felt as if my stays were too tight for me. I left Le Löffel's—without remembering to ascertain the date ; what did that matter ?—it was only an envelope with a flower in it—addressed in his handwriting which I had seen so often in replies to my invitations for picnics at Nauheim—and took Audely's long screed—typewritten, by the way, I forgot to tell you—and got back to Ilsa's room more dead than alive.

For once I wished she had not got a wallpaper of paroquets ; they seemed to dart forth and peck at me. Ilsa had to get her salts and chafe my hands before I could talk sensibly and tell her the result of my domiciliary visit. I—a woman who has defied a mad bull ! But it is spiritual terrors that break me up. . . .

Ilsa took it laughing.

"Good for Venice!" she said. "I didn't think she had it in her."

Then she began to chaff me about Audely, whom, I had begun now to realise, people have got into the way of considering as *my* property.

"If the lady in the letter is anybody at all, and not merely a figment of Audely's imagination?—it is you, Mother! For the last five years he has had eyes for no other woman—in this hemisphere at least!"

I admit Audely is fond of me. Why should I fatigue myself denying it? But as I keep telling them, I am only a respectable woman in a London suburb. Audely is what Arles once called a *gratis* person in every European Court, and these foreign women are fairly unscrupulous where their hearts—or rather their bodies—are concerned. I pointed out to Ilsa what he said in the letter about Her husband.

"But Papa *is* political," Ilsa said; "you cannot deny that; and Audely says *political*. . . ."

Then I flamed up. "Ilsa, you shock me! Everybody knows that dear old Arles never struck a woman save in the way of kindness in his life." I was remembering the way he used to give me a gentle blow on the shoulder now and then, and a "Go along wid you." It was his way of showing affection—in the days when he *could* show it, poor dear!

And I was beginning to feel quite sentimental about your father, and to fancy perhaps that I had allowed myself to see rather a lot of Audely Bar, and made perhaps too much fuss over him in the early days before he became such an institution, and that Arles may have thought I gave him too much of my time, to the exclusion of his own claims? . . . Well, it serves me right now, when he has gone and fallen in love with my own daughter! Or has he? I have never pretended to know. Audely's heart is a dark forest, indeed, where wolves lurk, as he is always saying. But though Venice is Venice—a pearl of great price—it is still rather extraordinary that he should have been thinking in that special way of a girl of whom he has never taken the slightest notice beyond chaffing her for various childish peccadilloes, such as untidiness and greediness! He says she eats like a pig, and can't put her clothes on properly. I have always relied on Audely to administer salutary criticisms on this sort of head. A girl, though offended with him, which

doesn't matter, takes it so much more to heart from a man. But the question arises, can a man love passionately, like this letter, a girl to whom he has occasionally to point out that she doesn't attend to her hands, or that she has left the back of her skirt unfastened, or has dropped about a quart of jam on the front of her blouse? These things are problems. . . .

But to business. Ilsa says that I must on no account let Venice know that I have discovered her secret—or secrets. Knowledge is power, but only if it is unshared. In the case of Count Le Löffel it will be easy enough, as he is presumably at home in Germany; the postmark on the envelope is Nauheim, which looks as if the poor boy's heart was not cured, and that he is back again at Nauheim this summer. And now, there again, men *are* queer! Venice dropped him, and was positively rude to him last year the moment he took an interest in another girl, a little American who was staying in the hotel, so that one wonders he should care to send Venice a dried flower even. . . .

It won't be so easy for me not to catechise Audely if he should come back! He has been away since January. I shouldn't really quite know what line to take with him. You will own that it is a little difficult for me, Laura. I don't exactly want, but I could hardly refuse to give him my daughter, if he came here full of desire, having found it possible to smoothe away the difficulty he speaks of, and as a regular *prétendant* for her hand. No mother could turn him down for her daughter without being suspected of *arrière-pensée*, which, God knows, I have not got, but people would be sure to attribute it to me. They give him to me, as you know, and certainly he never, to the naked eye, appears to look twice at any other woman.

He is cold. But from the matrimonial point of view he is a catch, and I don't know that any woman of my age has the right to lock up so much marriageableness to her own profit. Audely is well born, well off, well every thing! . . .

Ilsa takes a line in this that is distinctly comforting to me. She decrees that in Venice's interest I must not take this letter seriously, but allow it to die down and pass into forgetfulness, as Audely is sure to want it to do in a short while. He doesn't, really, want to marry, and probably prefers to keep the Spanish lady, and me too as *paravents*,

to screen and safeguard his bachelorhood. And moreover he is too old—forty-three—and too selfish and heartless to make an earnest, romantic creature like Venice happy.

Ilsa entered into a long disquisition *re* Audely, whom I never thought she had troubled to take in at all.

She will have it that his apparent unimpressionability and trick of ignoring them all *qua* women that they complain of, is just a blind for his vanity and laziness. In his heart of hearts he feels perfectly sure of them—the moment he wants them. Of course, being human, he does want them now and then a little, nor wants that little long, like the man in the hymn. He is a born philanderer. She says we don't realize that, or the multiplicity of his amours, because he is abroad so much. But it is a fact that Audely has affairs, of a vague sort, all over the world: hearthrugs he stands on, perches all over Europe, and at least one—to which he alludes in the letter—regular well-made nest in Madrid. The letter—pooh! she says it means nothing except that he is amusing himself by playing on Venice's vanity, as great as his own, and provoking a reaction from her. Of course, in Venice's case, it is just possible that he does fancy himself in love, but if that is so, it only means that one or two of his other flames, or hearthrugs, have turned him down. For he is so little altruistic that if one woman makes him suffer, he immediately seeks out another female victim whom he can excite, and upset and finally torment, and so revenge himself on the whole sex generally.

I told her to stop chipping at Audely, that I had had about enough of it, though it was doubtless a very clever piece of analysis. She is bitter. I suppose it is her own bad luck in these matters. . . .

I asked her to quit generalizations and make some definite suggestion as to the course of conduct she advised me to pursue with regard to Venice. I may as well profit by her ill-gained experience in the hearts of these modern men and women, who manage things so differently—more coarsely, if more easily—than their grandmothers did. She talked away as if she and I were quite on the shelf, which was a concession from Ilsa, to put herself in the same boat with her old mother, though I have kept my hair.

She advises more liberty all round, and especially in the Leahy case. She says that Ida is a nice girl, and her mother mad, but quite a decent sort; and that Gerald Something or

other, whom Ida is going to marry, is all right, though he does wear a soft collar—and one must realize that everybody can't be a gentleman these days, or else the world would stop and we British lose our place among the nations.

Ilsa was putting in a word for herself here, for no one could say that every member of her court is up to our standard, or anything like it. The *useful* ones certainly are not, but, as she says, they help to make the world go round and, incidentally, Ilsa to live on her allowance. Why don't we run to money? I often wonder. In the old days the great feudal lords were able to run up a castle like Bamburgh or Dunstanburgh in a week, putting on thousands of workmen, as Thomas of Gloucester did for Dunstanburgh. I suppose it comes to this, that he didn't pay them, as they were his serfs. Forced labour! there's the whole problem in a nutshell. It's the wild wages demanded on every hand that keeps us poor as a class, except for isolated stars like your Uncle Henry and the Dalruan baby, who, they say, could put us all in a pipe and smoke us and not miss us; and Bertie Corfe, if he wasn't so mortgaged—I dare say Ilsa could get him if she liked—or the Master of Cramont, quite penniless and always here. He never says anything, never has, nor never will, either to propose or discuss the weather, but he is so handsome and tall he quite trims the drawing-room and neutralises the— Well, I don't know, I get so confused among them all and why they come?

The one thing I was always sure of was that they didn't come for Venice, and now all that seems altered. If one man can propose, then others can, and one wonders what will be the next affair that Venice springs upon me? It adds a zest to life rather, and I really think our house party includes all the most eligible men of London, and this little success with Audely will hearten Venice and dispose her to take up with some man who *hasn't* got an entanglement.

Though most of them have, when you come to business details. There's always a tie—of sorts—something to be smoothed away, when a man marries.

I fancy a man rather likes to admit shyly to some other woman's previous claim on him when he proposes, so as to increase his prestige in the eyes of the one he is going in for seriously. It is, he implies, up to her to make him break every tie, human and divine, to get her; he will commit any

crime for her sake, and walk to her, like a Juggernaut, over a row of prostrate women's hearts. . . .

I am enclosing a copy of the Audely letter. I told Effel to make me five copies. We have no secrets from Effel. We simply couldn't get along if Effel wasn't *au courant* of everything and if there were mysteries for her. One would always be mixing the things she knew and the things she didn't. And without infinite trust Effel would be a danger, and no convenience. It would be like having to lock up all your jewellery every time you go out.

(No address.)

"DEAR LADY VENICE,

"When you receive this I shall be very far away. And I want you to know everything; it is your right. Although you have given me no encouragement, except kindness at various times, you have not made me feel that I have awakened your heart in any way. My fair snowdrop! I am a damned scoundrel, to dare to raise my eyes to you.

"For I am bound, though no one here knows it. A woman looks to me for life. In the eyes of the law, of course I am free, and always shall be, but in my own I am indissolubly tied to her.

"Years ago I contracted this obligation towards a woman some years my senior; bound to a vulgar pedantic political old brute who neglects her. One day he struck her in my presence! I beat his hand down and told him I could not allow it. The craven cringed and cowered and knocked under. That knit us together. I took her under my own control until death.

"So, dearest, you understand that in all our happy intercourse, so free, so untrammelled, under your dear mother's auspices, I dared not let myself go, or even hint at how adorable I thought you. I forced myself to treat you always as a child. I made up my mind to control my passion, and your beauty and sweetness have been alike powerless to break down the barrier of my honour.

"How often have I longed to take your hand in mine and whisper to you the words that knit two souls together before God—and your people! I do not think, if all had been well, that your mother would have put obstacles in the way. I could, in the jargon of our world, have found opportunities



for proposing to you scores of times at Beardmore or in Nauheim.

“Would you have accepted me? Even though renouncing, the natural man longs to know. You have the cold, serious *noli me tangere* manner which would frighten away any man who was not bold enough and sure enough to break through Brynhild’s chaperoning curtain of fire. I don’t imagine many men have dared to tell you they loved you, or ask you for *le don de l’amoureuse merci*, as they used to put it, in your Courts of Love. Yes, your parents and guardians may trust you anywhere. I should say that if they want to compass for you the detestable thing called ‘marrying you off,’ their plan would be to give you your head and allow you to walk alone through all the thickets of Bohemia till the icy chill of your reserve was thawed by the warmth of the cheerful irresponsible denizens of it. No man in your own set will ever do it. We have the unfortunate habit of taking No for an answer. *We* don’t ask unless we know we have a chance. Oh yes, you want the bloom rubbed off you, then you’ll go off, as they say vulgarly, like hot rolls; you’ll be so disgusted with the procedure of Bohemia that you’ll long to return to our more dignified methods.

“Your people must learn to treat you scientifically, if they want to get any yield out of you.

“I don’t fancy you will care to answer this. Not if I know you. So be it!

“Try to forget me. That will come naturally enough. I am absent. Nor am I one of those that women remember.

“Yours,

“G. J. M. A. BAR.”

## VI

### *From The Lady Arles*

LOCHROYAN.

It is the Fourth of July—the very anniversary of the day we used to go to tea at your Embassy, dear. And instead of Town, with the dear old season staggering to a close, and people all trying to squeeze things in, and see all their friends once more before the autumn break-up, here we are living in comparative peace and quiet, seven miles from a post town, fifteen from a railway station, out of it all, so early, for the first time since Venice was introduced. I feel quite strange, I can tell you. Venice is, of us all, seemingly least affected by what she is missing. The child has a social *flair* that doesn't go with her poetizing, and is a good sign. She realized, even more than I did, that the season was falling off so piteously, and that social events and junketings as at present constituted were not worth a single moonlight evening in the country, alone with the nightingales—so she said. Not that we hear them here. They are over. We none of us remembered that they leave off singing finally in May, with the cuckoo! But nightingales are fearfully overrated birds, Venice says, and their cry is not beautiful: more like a new-born babe than anything else!

This place is real country, not a suburban annexe like even dear Beardmore. This is neither more nor less than the Scottish Border, famed in song and history. I am full of it, having had to get it all up so as to give Mr. Biss what he has asked me for, an article on the dear old-fashioned out-of-the-way lore, that I have looked up even in these few days. I have covered a lot of ground in my search of old-world data. Here, just across the border, we do get the best of both countries. We can motor into England in a couple of hours any time. We can lunch with the Warmintons at

Bamburgh, and next day in Edinburgh with the Skenwigs. The men can have their golf in England while the women can go over and have tea at St. Abb's Head. Such a lot of gulls, my dear, you can't see the rock for them! That is going into my article. The difficulty is that it isn't a nice tea. Scotland, the land o' cakes, and which has just missed, by my being born at Newcastle, being my native country, doesn't seem to shine in local entertaining. One hears so much of scones and baps and girdle cakes, but it is mostly stale currant bun, and very, *very* rocky cakes. But Venice, bless her! is still pleased, even after the eleventh day.

I believe I have succeeded for once in giving her a holiday such as she likes. Lochroyan is, on the whole, up to the agent's circular. We are able to put up our twenty guests—thirty when it comes to girls, who like to sleep three in a bed. Venice can curl up anywhere, she says, but when it comes to the point she likes room to kick, like other people. Venice has got her Meinie, as she calls it, here. Ellen Reveley and Mary Scrymgeour, the De la Londe's girl, and the two unmarried Darcie colts, as Bertie Corfe calls them. The Darcies *are* a wild lot, but they all go off when the time comes in the most orderly way. And that little witch Zoë Courtauld Venice took such a fancy to at the Cressys. Why Bessy Cressy had her there I can't think, for she isn't quite "it," you know, but amusing and obliging: plays rag time tunes and fox trots and tells our fortunes by our hands or the cards in the evenings after dinner. She is one of the *jongleurs* in Venice's Court of Love, which is the great excitement here.

My girl got the idea of being president of a Court of Love like the Countess of Champagne, and having a meinie of maidens whom she would train up to sew and embroider and sing and dance, as the great feudal dames did, quite two years ago. We went to Provence, all of us, to visit the ancestral home of the race—the very town whence the St. Remys sprang, named by our very name. It made a great impression on her, and was a very successful holiday altogether. There is that old ruined castle of Romanille that the eldest son takes his title from, nestling still in the quiet shade of the little Alpilles, though the guide books hardly mention it, and the people round about don't know much more except that it is still called Château d'Amour. Courts

of Love, actually, Venice says, were held there, and she furnished me with all sorts of tips for my article. I entitled that *Glanum*, the old name of the town. My daughter is excessively annoyed that we christened her Venice instead of Mahaud, Maentz, or Maud even; her name of Venice being merely the result of hackneyed sentiment about the City of the Lagoons where I spent my honeymoon. I suppose you know that Barral Quenford is named after an ancestor of ours from those parts, Barral des Baux, who sold the city of Les Baux—such a quaint place!—to Charles of Anjou, since when it has been a ruin. Morality was different in those days. Poor Romanille, if he had lived, would never have ceded property or privilege to any invader, *qui que ce soit*. He would have died in the Last Ditch sooner than abrogate his birthright. . . . But I suppose Barral des Baux was a freebooter and had not those fine sentiments. We were all absolutely non-altruistic—perfect beasts—in the old days, Audely says—and even now, if we get right up against it.

There's a long poem by William Morris, too, that Venice gets inspiration from for these dressings up and queer costumes that were giving us a name in the countryside, till I put a stop to it and forbade them to go beyond the confines of the house and grounds. I don't mind in the evenings when we are alone with ourselves. Rowley Deane is very clever at designing them, and then the girls and Berrymore—chiefly Berrymore—make them up out of coloured calicoes from the village shop and whalebones that they pick my corsets to pieces for. Those monstrous head-dresses called hennins have to be propped up. The hateful things tickle Sir James' bald crown and keep getting mixed up with the chandeliers. And they cover all the hair.

I utterly refuse to wear a hennin and hide my one beauty. But the boys are inclined to fall in with Venice's humour, for the girls are all pretty and they get a lot of flirtation in, on the excuse that it is mediaeval manners. Venice has assigned to each maiden her special knight, who has to make it his business to go with his lady to feed the swans and sit with her in what they call the "carven boat at noon"—a rotten old tub that lives on the swan's pond and wants a coat of paint badly. I should like better to see the girls in honest serviceable coats and skirts instead of all this mediaeval flummery; but even comic clothes can't prevent the boys from looking the fine young fellows they are, so full of life and go and so

nice with the girls, and not taking advantage of all this liberty to be horrid. They call young George Lysons "Big Sir Gervaise"; and so he is, most chivalrous; and there is a Miles and a Giles and a—well, I cannot remember all these fancy names of Venice's choosing.

And Ilsa is taking a nice rest from her dreary necessary millionaires, as she calls them, and is just simply having a good time with the boys. She never in town has leisure to attend to them; they represent a waste of time, and she just lets them be round her without giving them the slightest attention. But we are here for pleasure, not business, and the boys adore Ilsa. They always do admire a large pink woman with yellow hair. Effel is happy too, messing about the bedrooms, and generally supervising people's comfort. I call her groom of the stole and still-room maid combined. I have promised her that when once we have settled down a little, she shall go and stay with her people at Perth for as long as she cares to stop away. She won't care to stop long—that is, unless I give Lucy a holiday at the same time, and I shan't do that, for I am lost without Effel. I am able to allow Venice far more freedom both here and in town, because as long as Effel accompanies her I have no fear, though she keeps starting new queer things to do and queer places she wants to go to, one after another.

I remember once she was wild to make the acquaintance of a certain lady authoress of whom one hears very little good: a brilliant creature, as they all do pretend to be when they are "wild"; it is the excuse their friends make for them. People say: Oh, she is without the moral sense—a law unto herself. No need to be good, for she is so clever! Well, Venice let herself be introduced, and accepted this lady's urgent invitation to have tea with her. I had to allow it, on condition Effel went too. Effel rather liked poor Miss Wagg, who had a sweet manner and looked so quiet. The worst ones do. Miss Wagg was especially polite to Effel, but I'm sure she objected to her presence there, for it effectually prevented her from grappling Venice to herself, as she meant to do. And the friendship has languished. The Wagg has evidently realized that it was no good.

It was another story with the Leahys. The first six times Effel went with Venice to tea, and lunch, and to four meetings. On these occasions Miss Leahy completely got

over my henchwoman, making much of her, and seeming quite as pleased to see the governess as the mistress. Effel got quite on her side, and announced to me that though she herself enjoyed going to the Leahys, I could let Venice go alone, for they were perfectly all right and could do her no harm, and possibly a great deal of good. She says they are clever enough not to appear to kow-tow to her, but like her for herself alone, and that is what pleases Venice, by way of a change. You can't get away from the fact that with people of that kind association with rank is an asset; the Leahys wouldn't be human if they didn't appreciate the advantage of a connection, however slight, with the daughter of one of the oldest reigning families in Great Britain: people who have supplied wives to heirs-apparent and counted kings among their ancestry. And to have her sitting at their table just like one of themselves! (I expect they all sit round it in the dining-room, with a cottage loaf and a pat of butter, like Socialists!)

And though Venice knows quite well what is due to her, and brooks no infringements of her privileges, she is almost *too* simple and modest in manner. Audely always says that my two daughters' absence of "manner" is something wonderful, and very beautiful.

I, of course, am a simple old off-hand thing, like a market-woman, and say just what comes into my head, and act as it occurs to me to act at the moment. That, he says, in its way, is equally aristocratic.

Lily St. Just is coming, and bringing Horace. They do say he married her for her money, and gave her his title in exchange. He is a great dancer, but that's not much good for Venice, who doesn't dance well, as you know; it is one of the griefs of my life. She is too tall and too long in the back; and I have noticed, although I am afraid to say it, that she turns in her feet in rather an ungraceful way.

Now Ilsa danced, and dances, like a fairy, all sorts of steps, though she is lazy and absolutely refuses to perform, unless you—or a man—go down on your knees to ask her. My girls don't get their want of energy from me, who have quicksilver in my veins, but from their father's side—the lazy *dolce far niente* Provençal blood. Ilsa is a true *méri-dionale*, Audely, who is good at making out these things, says. There is, on the other hand, Roman blood in Venice. She is distinctly of the Arlésienne type—clear-cut features, a

*soupeçon* of a moustache, and big eyes and a whiteness that makes people call her "The White Snowdrop," but which she says herself is anæmia.

And that's where she gets her faculty for stringing verses. She insisted on Lucy's teaching her Latin to help her with it, and knows quite a lot of Greek—another useless dead language! Lady Jane Grey was learned in the same way, I hear. Much use it was to her, except to get her head cut off!

The only discontented person here is Anatole, who has already asked for a week-end in town. He made all sorts of difficulties about coming, and only seemed a little more reconciled to the place when he heard that Lily St. Just was coming after all, bringing her maid. Indeed, he spoke of it before we left town—engineered it all, in fact. His passion for Effrosyne is the talk of the servants' hall: they're all a little jealous. Effrosyne keeps him good-tempered. If Lily had any idea that she is here as a pendant to Effrosyne! She isn't much of an acquisition just now, the girls say, so languid and introspective. Horace is a failure, she complains, and is so fidgety he makes her ill. Ill! She is ill of forty thousand a year, and too soft a bed, and a car too well hung, and too much spoon-meat and ease generally. And she has refused to bring her famous car, even though we should have to supply the petrol; but she is so hopelessly stingy, and always makes me pay her taxis in town, when the said car is out of order. I don't believe I should have asked her at all except for Anatole's sake.

By the way, Laura, don't mention Anatole in any of your letters, because Arles made me definitely dismiss him before we came here. I've got him, but under the rose.

I don't feel a bit ashamed of deceiving Arles. I had to think of Venice. I simply couldn't have the poor child's summer spoilt for the sake of an old man's whim.

I was sitting at my *escritoire* in the morning-room at home, and poor old Arles was standing near me, shaking all over with the effort of putting his foot down, he so seldom does. I fiddled with a piece of blotting-paper, and calmly told him, without raising my eyes, that I had got a new cook already; that Anatole had only that morning told me of his wish to leave me. I added with emphasis: "She is a good plain cook; I got her from the Lycean Club"—Arles still stood firm—"and you will get your nice loin chop that you are always asking for, but Venice will starve."

As Arles dines always in his room, and rarely lunches with us, we have only got to keep the lunches simple. That will be all right here, for Anatole lets the kitchenmaid help a good deal, so as to get his freedom in the middle of the day. He goes pretty regularly into Peebles and Berwick to Cinema—Anatole adores cinemas—and brings back all the latest news. The papers do come here so irregularly. I don't believe Arles would recognize Anatole if he were to meet him going out, with his billycock stuffed hard down over his black curls, trying to look English as a compliment to us. The dear man goes pretty far afield in search of amusements; he says the Peebles cinema palls after a time, and I don't see why I should thwart such a good servant. He asked me quite civilly the other day if I would mind his going up to London for a day and a night on business. And he was very good, thinking of us, even when away on his pleasure; he brought us back some really excellent fish. We are quite close to numberless fishing villages, and yet we are glad to get fish from London. Isn't it a joke? His temper is much improved too; I put that down to the presence of Lily's maid.

So, as I said before, I think we shall have a merry time, if only Arles will settle down. He goes about the house with his hands behind his back, as he used to do when we were at Sofia the year M. Stambuloff was murdered. He was awfully shaken, I remember, when Mrs. S. called, bringing the six fingers of her husband that were found in the gutter. I never saw them. His fixed idea is the Balkan Imbroglio, from which he says all the difficulties of Europe have risen and will arise. To hear him one would think of the Balkans as a kind of stock-pot kept on the fire, in which trouble is continually brewing.

Yet it is more than a fortnight since the murder of the Archduke, from which Arles expected so much, and nothing so far has happened. There are *pourparlers* going on between the Ministries of Austria and Servia, I believe; but what does that come to? As usual they will end in a compromise, or nothing. The poor man was cruelly murdered, and there it is! The only result of it will be to distress his poor old father, and may perhaps kill him, and then, as people say, Europe *may* flare up. All this seething of the pot is sure to bring on something, some day, but not in our time, I do hope. I shall hope to get Venice's affairs settled first.



I have been to her room again, but found no more letters. Probably Audely only wrote the one letter. He will have forgotten all about it before he comes home, from what Venice calls his eighth incarnation; that is, his eighth long absence. He is in Bosnia, this time, so far as I can tell, and that rather makes me think that something *is* really happening in those parts, for Audely always seems to be in the thick of things. He always waits to see the storm-cone hoisted before choosing his destination, and goes off automatically there where the fun is fastest and most furious. So when he comes home I shall expect to hear the rights of it.

And *re* the Leahy wedding—Venice did have her way after all. It was wisest. I let her oblige her dear Ida, and, as well, grappled Ida to me through my complaisance. And the marriage was hurried on, so as to be got in before Mrs. Leahy left town to attend a Socialist Congress, somewhere abroad. . . . My Venice waited Mrs. Leahy's convenience! And Gerald was in funds, for he got a wonderful commission from—who do you think?—your Aunt Minna, to entirely rearrange the wild garden at Tinsack. She had set her heart on a Futurist landscape garden. I don't know where she picked up Gerald, but the fact is, she was at the wedding. Extraordinary woman! And the dress will not even have to be scrapped. It was designed by Wyndham Lewis, and is eccentric, of course, but quite wearable. I am beginning to think that Futurism—or Vorticism—has come to stay now the right people are beginning to take it up, and one may as well receive the incoming tide cheerfully, and give it welcome.

I have put my pride in my pocket, and asked the young Quains here. I cannot pretend any more that their influence is harmful to Venice. The contrary. She is much improved lately—gayer, more ordinary, taking interest in the sort of thing that belongs to her age, don't you know, and flirts a little in quite a nice way. She is keeping her promise to me to make no difference between the people who amuse her, like Rowley Deane, and the "dullies," meaning our own set, the Tremaines, Sir James Molendinar, the Darcie boys, and so on. Every one likes her new manner. Hermy puts it, in her coarse way, that her brothers say Venice isn't half the silly kid she used to be. She says she saw her popping strawberries into Mr. Tremaine's mouth the other day over the bed—the strawberry bed—and it is

a fact that last night she let Philip Wyandotte carry her upstairs. Hermy considers that sitting for hours to Rowley Deane is only an excuse for flirting. That's nonsense, for what enjoyment can she get out of it? And the strawberry popping is harmless enough. It is only that poor Venice never can do anything by halves.

You remember Jack Tremaine? An awfully nice man, but not quite the sort of person you could get up a flirtation with, though he is now a widower, here with his sister. They are due back in India within a month, though he is otherwise quite eligible.

Venice is quite nice, too, with old Sir James Molendinar—Arles' old pal in diplomacy. It is a great pull for Arles—and incidentally me—getting *him* here. He keeps your father amused, reminding each other of all their diplomatic antics in the past, the shindies and close shaves. . . . To listen to them, you'd think that the fate of all the Governments in the world hung on the point of a needle or the freak of a careless youth in the Foreign Office!

James indulges Arles in all his little whims; the last is cards, all day in the morning-room. Directly after breakfast they turn in there, draw down all the blinds so as to create the illusion of a night club, turn on the electric, and play Poker from dawn till dewy eve. I don't suppose the fad will last, so one makes no objection; Arles is an old man, and Sir James wants a rest. But it is very unhealthy rest, and it is rather hard on me to withdraw a man whose conversation is so interesting as Sir James' from general circulation!

Mr. Biss complains bitterly; he was trying to persuade his memoirs out of Sir James for publication, but he can't get at him for this mad fit of card playing, so he says. I don't care. I only asked Mr. Biss because of Venice's poems. He is most uninteresting with his constant talk of so much per thou and thirteen as twelve. It bored Venice so, that although it's her own book he's going to bring out, she flees from him, and leaves him to me or to Susan Dowlais, who rather likes him. Susan will, and always would, take on anybody that calls itself a man. She sits and looks into his little eyes as if publishing talk were love-compliments. Susan and Lily, I regret to say, don't get on; they are such a pair of them, and I ought not to have had them here together. They are very disagreeable about the Meinie, too, because

they aren't equal to a mile's saunter to an old pond to feed a swan, so they say, though they rather delight in the Love discussions we have in the evenings after dinner, and take a part in the speeches. Everybody is bored by their instances of Early Victorian love—old fashioned, but not old fashioned enough, Venice explains to me. I quite realize that the young ones are anxious to get on, but all the same, I insist on deference to the opinions of the old, otherwise I won't have a Court of Love at all.

Poor Susan, she *is* a wreck! When I think of her past, and how handsome she was and could have had anybody she liked, and *did*. But she never had an open scandal, like poor Lily; there was never any divorce or filthy servant's evidence called in, which was what so coarsened Lily's affairs of the heart—or body, whichever you like to call it.

And Susan, unlike Lily, always selected such *good* men to be compromised with. One of them was a—well, we all know, even you, who and what he was—and she kept *him* six years. I remember once, when she was staying with us at Beardmore, and all the children—her own house in Wilton Place had been completely burnt out, and I had to take her in—I complained to Masters, my old nurse, who had brought Venice into the world—I was always in such a hurry, you know, and never waited for the doctor—I complained to Masters of the dreadful self-will and screaming of the second boy. Old Masters said calmly to me, "Well, my lady, what can you expect? He is an Angernoune!" And since Admiral of the Fleet; and, as everybody knows, got rid of in spite of his great qualities, because his temper is so violent, that nobody can work with or under him.

As I write, Venice is sitting out on the lawn, posing for Rowley Deane, and eating fudge. It distorts her mouth completely, but *he* doesn't seem to mind, and it proves that she is not vain. He has put her under a maple tree, and under the shade of the leaves she appears like a dappled horse, and quite forty. Hermione Mackenzie remarks that Rowley is really a Futurist and sees ahead, and that in three years more Venice will have the moustache he is painting her with.

I can't think why I have Hermy here, except that she's a relation, and that her mother was my best—or my worst—friend. It is all the same when you're girls, and have

jealousies. Alice Darcie certainly tried to sneak Arles from me, but didn't, I am happy to say, succeed. I kept him, and that is perhaps why I stand Hermione and the others. For those girls infest my house, and most of them have been married from it. But when Hermy hints that if nobody else comes forward, I may find it convenient to give Venice to Deane, I feel as if I must tell her all about Audely. Hermy would be awfully upset about that, thinking it such good business, and a triumph of match-making! But then, she would take occasion to crow over my having to surrender what she calls my "mash" to my own daughter. You know the nonsense that is talked about me and a man fifteen years younger than myself? I would give him up to Venice like a shot if I thought he'd stick to her. But she wants something stable, kind, and strong, and Audely is only the middle thing. He has no will at all. I can make him do what I want all the time. Out of laziness he would give in to Venice, just as I do, and that would be bad for her as a permanent thing. But it *was* difficult to refrain, Laura, for Hermy, as if she had known what I was thinking, began to hint about Audely and the other woman—everybody has got hold of that, it appears. The Spanish lady, Hermy says, has threatened to commit suicide if Audely leaves her. . . .

In spite of what Hermy said, and in spite of Audely's letter, which in some sort bears her out, I cannot bring myself to believe in the existence of another woman in Audley's life—not like that, at least. If it is anybody, as Ilsa says, it must be me! That's ridiculous on the face of it—and of me, though I have kept my hair. I said calmly, getting as much finality into my speech as I could, that had not she found—that *was* a nasty one, for I had heard something of the kind *re* herself—that there was nearly always another woman, by whom he had had three or four children, who threatened suicide; but that if you agree, through your solicitors, to give her a competence for life and to bring up her children as carpenters, and so on, you will never find it necessary to have the river dragged for her?

So that was that!

I wrote all this yesterday. Funny, for it was only to-day, about one, that a messenger came up from Kirkmichael to say Audely was home and arriving in time for lunch, and

he wanted it badly, for he'd had nothing to eat since he left Bosnia. I couldn't guess how long ago that would be, but I do know that Audely is apt to draw a long bow, and I dare say he didn't think to order luncheon baskets in advance at the different stages of his journey. He supposed we should all be out. He would walk, because he knew we wouldn't have enough petrol to send in for him. That was true. Maggs couldn't get any in Kirkmichael for love or much money. It needs Arles to make a strong protest with the authorities.

I halloed to Venice and told her the news, and looked hard at her to see how she would take it? I could not discern slight changes of countenance through the dapple of the leaves, so I wish I had waited to go up to her and tell her about Audely's arrival, for then I should have seen at close quarters if she was at all affected. Only one is always careful of interrupting a sitting. The artist glares at one so. So *that* opportunity was lost.

One wonders what the child will do. Effel and Ilsa both think, Nothing! That she is too much wrapped up in Rowley Deane just now, and that if Audely says anything about his feelings to her, will snub him and make a good deal of the fact that he is supposed, popularly, to be mine.

Ilsa has rubbed in that absurd notion until she has almost succeeded in making your poor old mother, Laura, feel quite an improper woman of sorts. So now, in self-defence, I try to make her take longer views and wider ones.

"We only know him here, dear," I tell her and Effel. "How do we know what he is up to when he is away? He may have an affair in every capital in Europe, for all we know!"

"It's business, then," Ilsa sneered. "I cannot imagine Audely wanting a woman for any normal purpose. . . . But of course they may be useful telling him things. . . ."

"What *do* you mean, Lady Ilsa?" Effel asked, shocked. And Ilsa, in a real naughty, teasing mood, answered that she had sometimes wondered if Audely wasn't in the Secret Service!

I said, "In that case I should certainly expect him to give me all the tips he can. And as a matter of fact he has never told me anything."

"Perhaps," Ilsa drawled, "he is giving some other country's secret service tips off *you*!"

Effel quietly left the room, or I don't know that I shouldn't have asked her to. I cannot bear insinuations against Audely, and there is always something odious even about the superior forms of spying. It means Audely would be shot if he was caught, and there was a war on. And although I will not, could not, suspect anything that isn't perfectly honourable about Audely . . . there is his facility of languages and all. . . . The spying jobs have to be done. . . .

And there is something a little bit sinister in the way Audely keeps his countenance; not only keeps it, but succeeds, if he chooses, in throwing an expression of complete frog-like vacuity over it: a veil of dense unnatural stupidity—what you will—between you and him. He is a born diplomat, that is true. Arles has often said so, and deplored the fact that he is such a dilettante that he did not care to go into anything useful.

After all, Audely was late for lunch, and I did not get any chance at detective work, for Venice was punctual; she says sitting always makes her hungry. She came in with Rowley Deane—the others were all away at Kelso for golf, and Ilsa and Hermione and the Tremaines gone to Edinburgh for the day—and what I did was just to sit and watch them eating. Indeed, I who am not supposed to be concerned, was so *émotionnée* about Audely's arrival as to be unable to eat, though I made a show, not to let Venice think there was anything wrong. It was awful sitting opposite those two cheerful creatures. Rowley Deane, of course, all unconscious of the wide issues that he has come to be mixed up with through being a guest here, and Venice—well, I can't make her out? A girl who has had a letter like that from a man, consuming chicken and cold curry at such a normal rate, when he is coming back to ask her final decision!

And when the meal was over she ran off to her own room to finish a piece of type-writing she had set herself to do. And it was a quarter-past two, and even then there was no sign of Audely! . . .

There was nobody but me at the lunch table when he did come in, and he was all white dust off the roads and too hungry to talk until he had got something into him. So really all my day was spent in watching people eat. After he had had enough, and in spite of his tale of starvation it wasn't much, he settled down with me and a cigarette

in the garden under the deodar. We saw a white skirt pottering over croquet in the distance—which I recognized to be my daughter's; but he said :

“Is that Venice? How is she?” and went on talking about Bosnia—the only source of romance left untapped in the world!

I could not get him off Bosnia. I talked about Hermione and her coming baby. I talked of his friends Gerald and Ida, and their projected wedding tour, just with the idea of getting off indifferent matters on to something personal, like marriage, but all he said, with some heat, was that the Quains wouldn't be able to go to Munich this year!

He was like a fortress with a glacis, don't you know. I could not get past his cold blue stare. I discussed several coming *causes célèbres*, and various entanglements of men we knew, and said what a lot of pain they cost the other person. I abused those awfully wicked women who just for the sake of their vanity, or keeping their husbands in order, take on some poor boy, and keep him dangling without any hope of reward. I trenched upon the indecent almost, in my desire to get at his point of view about his own trouble. I even admitted that on the whole I should have more respect for a woman who, when she found she was hopelessly pledged, paid her debts—of dishonour—if need be.

He just listened. He always does listen. It makes people consider him sympathetic when he is only uninterested. It costs him nothing to mark time, and he sits so still; I never knew a man practise immobility as an art, except Audely.

Venice is very quiet too. She would suit him in that particular. But I am different, and sometimes feel it so annoying that I long to cuff him or throw a book at him. It is to insult a woman to remain calm when she has let herself get excited. I was more angry with Audely than I had ever been in my life. I told him to go to his room and have a good lie-down, and as soon as Ilsa got back from Edinburgh I went to her room, and poured my sorrows out to her. Ilsa didn't console me much. She would go on about my being the entanglement.

“Not the barbed-wire kind, but a nice comfy one,” she went on. “The kind a selfish man likes. A good, well-managed house always open to him, and no questions asked by some vain woman he's made mistress of it, and that's trying to get herself adored. For you aren't vain, Mother;

no one could say so. And Audely is as selfish as they make them."

"He is always doing kind things, Ilsa," I argued.

"It pleases his vanity; he is stupendously vain as well. That doesn't trouble you, Mother; your eyes are only half open where Audely is concerned. You just suit each other. But younger eyes see clearer. I don't deny he's a dear, even when you *have* seen through him. But if you are so determined to deny your conquest, I'll tell you what Hermy is putting about, now—that it's really *Papa* Audely likes!"

That *was* rather a new idea to me, for I've known Arles all my life, and I made up my mind not to ask Hermy to stay on for the Lysons' party.



## VII

### *From The Lady Arles*

LOCHROYAN HALL.

It was like great shocks, one after the other—Austria mobilizing, Russia mobilizing, Germany and France mobilizing! Boom! Boom! Just to look at the papers any day now sets one's poor heart thumping—mobilizing is such a big sort of word, and seems to roll about in one's mouth like a cannon ball! And of course the papers like to make the most of it, as if it was a new murder discovery, or an explosion in America, with their disgusting large print head-lines. Heavily leaded type, Audely says, is calculated to raise the circulation of both paper and reader.

And here we are, prisoners, mewed up in this big house in Scotland, seven miles from a post-office and fifteen from a railway station, and everything to fetch, including news. We really needed our car—it wasn't for pleasure, but for absolute use—but does the Government think of that for a moment, when it goes and forbids the sale of petrol? That is really the thing I feel most, and which strikes me as most unfair, when all the horses nearly are gone too! The servants are naturally furious, especially the foreign ones, who have to walk seven miles into Kirkmichael every other day to register. All are as cross as two sticks, except Anatole, who is a tower of strength in this trying time, and wins golden opinions everywhere, except of course from Arles, and that is because, luckily, Arles hasn't the slightest idea that Anatole is under the same roof with him. I am glad I practised this bit of deceit on my husband, for it has turned out so well. The good man walks into Kirkmichael himself, nearly every day, and brings the papers and anything else we require that he can carry. I call that very decent of him, for he is stoutish, and foreigners as a rule don't care much for walking. And above all he keeps up our spirits; his manner is perfect, nowadays; not a trace of the old acerbity

left; he is just cheerful and comforting. He seems to think sincerely that everything will soon be all right. He fancies France will get a little taken down and punished for her vaingloriousness and boasting. He will have it that she has pursued a consistent policy of pin-pricks towards the German Government ever since 1870—has been trying to egg on Germany into war. I always thought that Anatole was French in sympathy, but now he says that Alsace and Lorraine don't want really to be given back to France; it is only *des intransigeants* who foment discontent. I don't agree with him, but I rather like a little political discussion with Anatole now and then, in the middle of all the dreary discussions about coals and transport, which all falls on me.

The Government are really taking things with too high a hand. People's good carriage horses are being forcibly bought from them every moment—hunters, too. Mrs. George Lysons of Aldivalloch madly took the law into her own hands, and gave her groom orders to have her favourite horse shot half an hour after the commissioners had marched into her stable yard, and bought him for quite a good price, mind you! Of course, when they found out what she had done, she was most severely reprimanded, but what could they do to her? The horse was dead.

We were at tennis there the day after, and as she and I sat side by side watching the young people at their play, she told me, with tears in her eyes, that what drove her to do it, was the thought of "The Jester" being in a battle and hit, and neighing out his poor life in pain, and no vet near to see to him. (Horses scream, I believe.) So the moment they had left she rushed off to the stables, kissed "The Jester" on the muzzle, and was led weeping away while they bandaged his eyes and made preparations for his extinction. He was buried by the knoll at the bottom of the garden. She could talk of nothing else. Such cruel, useless nonsense, she said, since England wasn't in it, wasn't going to be in it; and even if she was, we weren't a military nation, but should rely on the Navy. What was the Navy there for?

It was a Calmadyish thing to do, and I could not help thinking that it was all rather excessive for a horse, however well bred, when all the while there was her only son, sitting at Venice's feet, and rising up to go in to deal his tremendous services that make all give way before him. That is like all people who are crazy about animals. She will deny her

country the use of a good horse, while she'll cheerfully give her only begotten son. He is gloating over the prospect of seeing some service: he is in the Territorials already. I heard him telling Venice that if England—he spoke of her as a man might of a mistress whom he could whip for misbehaviour—if England doesn't behave herself, and come in properly, he means to enlist in the French Army; or, if they won't have him, in the Foreign Legion. Venice told him that he would have to commit a crime of sorts before he could get into that! Boy and girl talk, but I confess that as I sat through that golden afternoon and listened to Mrs. Lysons' lamentations and heard that beautiful boy discussing war as if it was only another form of football, saying that however you might talk, it was "just a jolly good scrum in the end," I felt a sort of boding feeling. . . . My mother had second sight. But still:

"Wha looks to freits, my master dear,  
Then freits will follow him."

One mustn't take too much notice of forebodings; they reduce one's vitality and one's stock of courage—for when it does come.

The old French lady sitting next to me seemed to feel something of the kind too. She shook her head sadly once when George Lysons got off an extra splendid serve, and all the muscles of his wonderful chest stood out;—

"*Encore un autre que les Prussiens vont nous manger!*" she muttered. She was an interesting personage—Duchesse de Castiglione, the mother of Mrs. Lysons' French sister-in-law—and had been in the Siege of Paris. She had seen the Prussians enter through the Arc de Triomphe. The poor old custodian had raked up the gravel under it, hoping to make them stumble. She says Bernhardt, the man they are reading so much now, was the first to ride down the Avenue des Champs Elysées—alone!

Altogether my sum of vitality was considerably lowered by one thing after another, and at tea afterwards in the house—for the golden afternoon turned to rain as usual in Scotland—we still talked War, and oh, the ridiculous travellers' tales some of the people got up!

Some one had been—or seen a man who had been—up at Rosyth Dock, and it was full of German spies walking about as large as life! Some one else said we had caught three

German officers, one of whom was supposed to be Prince Eitel Friedrich, that nice boy I used to entertain in town, who got engaged to the American beauty, you remember, with a doubtful mother who was always being photographed with her dachshunds, and the then German Chancellor had to come over and see her and force her to give back the engagement ring and accept a pension—well, they were all arrested poking about on the glacis in front of Edinburgh Castle. Nearer us, at the little fishing village of Eyemouth, last night, a German gunboat had been sighted, prowling about, and why didn't our Fleet come at once and sink her? Our Fleet, never there when wanted!

I know where our Fleet is; I had tea on her a week ago; but I suppose I had better not tell you, even in a letter.

At all events our Fleet isn't going to bestir itself for a paltry German gunboat! Let her ride there at anchor and find out what she can, and stew in her own juice and eat her soul out. I've no patience with people who want the Fleet to do policeman's work. The Fleet is there to fight and engage the enemy in battle.

When it came to a German concrete gun emplacement, engineered so long ago as last year, under the gulls on the Bass Rock, I got up to go, driving my little flock in front of me! I felt these people would end by destroying one's nerve. We had to walk all the way back, because Arles will insist on our economising petrol, and Ellen Reveley got so done that two of the boys had to carry her in a bandy chair, which brought the situation home to us rather closely.

Arles is of course the only one of us who knows anything of politics, and so can, to a certain extent, calculate probabilities. And he is in his element, not condescending to tell us anything much, in the good old diplomatic fashion. But he and Audely both admit that though they were in Germany for six weeks last autumn, they guessed nothing; and yet they made a point of going down into the *Bier stube* in the different little provincial inns we stayed in every night, and listening to the chimney-corner talk.

I believe, if war breaks out, it will be found to have been engineered entirely by the Court and Military party, and that the People will know nothing much about it, but obey blindly, as always.

Arles is asked the same question in a different form about fifty times a day. The elders say, "Shall we have to come

in?" The boys ask "if England is going to behave decently." So you can imagine the cross-fire of question and answer is fairly lively at breakfast. (Arles is so much better in the country that he is able to give us the pleasure of his company at that meal.) He does not give us much satisfaction, and the poor Tremaines, who are beginning to wonder if they will be able to get back to India this autumn as planned, are so anxious for tips. But either it is the diplomatic habit of making mysteries where none ought to exist, or he has got out of bed the wrong way and wants to be tiresome, or he perhaps frankly doesn't know; he mumbles something unsatisfactory: "My dear lady——!" or "My dear chap!" as the case may be. "How can I tell?" "How can any one tell? This is entirely a novel contingency."

Then—to show you how we go on—I say, with I think ample justification, voicing the opinion of all the soberer persons present: "Then, dear, what are the respective Governments about, not to keep some sort of order?"

"There'll be plenty of order when it comes to killing," Sir James Molendinar said in his beard.

"But that's absolutely mediaeval," Venice exclaimed; "a sheer return to barbarism, settling a set of commercial difficulties—you can't call them dynastic—by the old-fashioned medium of the sword!"

I was pleased to hear her say this, for it showed she had thought about it and used the lessons of history Lucy had given her. I said, backing her up:

"It will be fearfully tiresome, to say the least of it, considering how interdependent we have grown to be on each other—what with postal arrangements and tariffs and railways——"

"Ah!" Sir James Molendinar said. "If the German higher command can be got to share your house-keeping instincts, Lady Arles." I could not tell if he was laughing at me or not, but he went on solemnly: "If a war does come, it will not be so much a return to barbarism as a trial of the world's brand-new resources in engineering and chemistry and what not. It will be the beginning of a new era in hostilities. The contest would be something unparalleled in the history of the world."

I hastily interposed: "My dear James, there was Marathon, and more recently Waterloo!"

I thought I had scored, but he brushed me aside, saying that Waterloo was fought round two farms, a mere affair of outposts, compared with a European war of this century. . . .

It was becoming too depressing, these dreadful generalities about a situation that may after all never occur. I tried to get the conversation brought down to something more concrete, such as the monetary situation, which would be sure to be a good deal disturbed. I said, laughing :

“I say, Arles, what about money? Shall we all be ruined?”

Arles happened to take it with seriousness, and the poor Tremaines looked blue.

“One cannot tell,” he answered. “One has no notion how credit would have to be dealt with. It will be a question for the big banks. I have myself no manner of doubt that they will be equal to it; but individuals will be sure to suffer. . . .”

I am shocked to think how little we have in the house and how lavish Arles is with our own little hoard. He takes everybody's cheques and gives cash for them. His desk is snowed up with paper. For, as a result of this sort of talk, everybody is filtering away. The Tremaines are going back, en route for India, poor dears! and Venice's Meinie of maidens, naturally, has been broken up; their parents are insisting on their return, sending maids for those that came without. I don't blame them; travelling is not nice for women nowadays. And every girl's place in times like these is by her own fireside, out of the way when hard knocks are being given, as they used to say of the border forays. A man will fight twice as well if he is sure his womenkind are well looked after, and sheltered from the things *they* have to bear.

The boys are nearly all gone. They champed and *piuffed*, as Venice said, like mettled horses straining to be off at a gallop. One, however, the biggest—that young George Lysons I mentioned to you in the earlier part of this letter—was rather sorrowful, and nearly wept as he wrung my hand in the hall. Venice had insisted on his coming to stay with us after the tennis party, and he straightway went and fell in love with Zoë Courtauld, and would have proposed if he had had time. He was the one the girls called “Big Sir Gervaise, that good knight,” and Zoë was Constance Fille-de-fay, I believe. She used to tell our hands every

night, and when she came to his she was always very sad about it. I can't believe she has powers—a mere girl like that! But it worked some of them up so that I set my face against all occultism.

Mr. Biss and Susan Dowlais and Belle-Belle went up to town together. I suppose Susan wants to try *her* hand at fascinating a publisher. She has also given Rowley Deane a commission to paint her drawing-room with a frieze—or is it a dado?—of naked women and boiler engines. He wants to rush up to town to get on with it, but I prefer him to stay here and finish Venice's portrait, for I'm sure I don't want to buy it, odious as it is, unfinished. Arles will give in to him; I feel it in my bones. Arles likes him, because he is pretty and very respectful. Well, I like him too, and I must say he has been very useful.

We almost live in the hall, these days, there is so much coming and going into Kirkmichael, two or three times a day, in search of stores; and news is an event, and sends us all on to the doorstep. And all these boys going, in batches, whooping for joy!

I begin to feel a sense of depression. The horror grows. It is like Booms—dull explosions, as I said—a sort of frequent hollow reverberation such as we used to hear down at Littlestone and at Folkestone, when we were always told it was guns at Shoeburyness. The servants, even in those days, used to be afraid of a German invasion. The papers make me miserable. The word mobilization has got on my nerves. And Gerald Quain's telegrams which Venice has got him to send us from London, to supplement the papers which we can never get till lunch time! They are like margarine, which I have never tasted, but they say it is a very unpalatable substitute for butter.

My house party seems to enjoy them and base the whole day's conversation on them. I am not sure, but I think I'd rather know nothing. The scrappiness of it only adds to the uncertainty. As it is, one never knows as one ties the strings of one's petticoat in the morning—you see what an old-fashioned body I am, Laura—one never knows what the news will be that greets one as one takes one's place behind the tea-urn. But one realizes that the only thing to do is to tie a good firm bow as usual, and not come to pieces, and do the other usual things as far as possible, and keep up one's courage

and try to amuse people: make bricks without straw—*i.e.* motors and means of getting about, and you have no idea how hard that is!

It is no consolation to reflect that soon there will be nobody left here to amuse. The party dwindles day by day; only twelve of us here now: we four Arles, Lucy and Effel, Sir James Molendinar, Bertie Corfe, who has sprained his ankle, the Master of Cramont (and he's going back to Paris to-morrow), and Hermy Mackenzie whose company I'd rather be without, and Philip Wyandotte and Freddy White, in a blue rage because he's only sixteen and his father says he's to go and finish his holidays in Ireland. Mr. Biss was rather torn, but he finally went with Susan. He thinks he has got me, and now he wants to acquire Susan and get his lady-ghost to dish up her reminiscences, which will be wonderful, doubtless, if she tells the truth. I don't suppose I shall publish any more with Mr. Biss, I hear that Chick & Chuck are such much better publishers. . . .

Gerald's telegrams ought to comfort me; they are full of Sir Edward Grey's valiant attempts to keep the peace. He does seem to realise that he has a great nation's destinies in his hands and won't involve them in a suicidal policy of intervention unless it is strictly necessary. I remember in one telegram he says that "If Germany bombards French ports we give all our help." Yes, with the Navy; that's according to promise; but the Navy isn't the Army, which consoles me a little. We haven't much Army, and we were so punished in the Boer War. Why, there was one week when I scarcely dared to take up a paper for fear of seeing the death of a connection, at least. The Spion Kop time, when we got the news of the death of Kirkover, my cousin, and Paul Wyandotte, this boy's father, I had to scold Ilsa for buying a lot of coloured clothes, as she did at once, out of a bitter sort of bravado. She objected that if one was to wear mourning for all the men killed in the war, it would have the effect of sending the whole world of aristocratic women, at least, into black, and what would become of the gaiety of the nations? Ilsa was awfully heartless in those days. I sometimes think she cared for Paul Wyandotte, rather, and it took that form. . . .

Venice, of course, didn't realize the Boer War. She was too young. But it is a fact that we have never been able



yet to make good the blue blood spilt and wasted then, and that the stock of marriageable young men of our rank has sensibly decreased, with all sorts of attendant inconveniences : one of course that the scions of many secondary families became great catches, which is immoral. . . .

This was the worst day. Somehow or other this morning's telegram from Gerald puts the lid on. I shall not be able to believe in Sir Edward Grey any more. He has shown that he can't avert this—or anything else. . . . What is going to become of England ? Poor, fool-hardy England ! . . .

We all seemed to lose all hope, and we all took it differently, according to character. I spent the day in my room with my *prie-Dieu* (which is an immense comfort. It leads one to pray more intently, having the means to stay on one's knees longer). Sir James in the study alone, for Arles and Bertie Corfe were both in bed. Rowley Deane said frivolously at dinner, that he had done the best day's work of his life at the portrait, for Venice's face had gained at least three per cent. of animation.

Of course he, as an artist, has no sort of stake in it all. But he made us laugh at least ! As if it mattered for his kind of work what expression was on his sitter's face ! He never looks at her, so Venice complains.

Whatever she may have looked to him, I saw no change. Very soon after breakfast she went back to the dining-room, rang the bell rather violently, and ordered in the chafing-dish arrangement and chocolate and butter and cream. She said she felt like making some "Fudge." Cooking was, I suppose, a relief from tension. I have heard since that she didn't employ much art about it—poor child ! just, in her despair, flung in the ingredients pell-mell and commenced stirring them as if she were a mere automaton. It came out quite good stuff, for a wonder, and she was sucking Fudge and distending her mouth out of bravado all the time she was sitting for Rowley Deane, and he never objected, because, as she said bitterly, he never noticed what she was doing.

The servants were very good, poor things, all except the German under-kitchen maid—Anatole's find, who turned out very badly. Anatole got her for me, just before we left town. He said she was a woman he thought he could work with and keep up the pretence that she was cook, if ever Arles should think fit to make inquiries. Anatole laughed

one of his rare laughs when he said she was our masked battery, he being the real gun behind her. I laughed, rather on the wrong side of my mouth. I don't really like cheating Arles, but what can one do?

To return to this girl who rather troubled what one used to call one's peace. She suddenly took to having hysterics, alternating with sulky fits. Possibly the other servants have been making her feel herself a pariah—have rubbed her unfortunate nationality into her. Anatole owned that if he had known what was going to happen, politically, he would have taken a calm Swiss who had offered herself to him for the place.

As it was, Grethe's screeches penetrated through the door that divides the servants' quarters from the big hall where we have taken to sitting, nowadays that so much goes on in it. Anatole—I can't think how he managed to do the talking when engaging her—cannot speak a word of German and stood there like a deaf-mute while she yelled out incomprehensible abuse at the top of her voice. He owned himself, with a shrug, quite unable to deal with her, and when a woman, Effrosyne (Lily's Greek maid, you know), laid her hand upon her shoulder to try and pacify her, the girl actually turned on her like a cat and tried to bite her arm. It was a deadlock, and I was so afraid that Arles, deaf as he is, would hear! . . .

We have managed so well that he has not the slightest idea that Anatole is still an inmate of the establishment. It was however getting exceedingly awkward for me. At last Audely—the useful creature, as I always say—offered to go and tackle her. He speaks her beastly language. It transpired that what she was afraid of was that if we went to war with her country we should keep her a prisoner in this fortified house, as she would have it that Lochroyan Hall is—because of the old Crimean cannon all over the garden, with geraniums growing out of them!—and that she would never get back to Marburg in Hessen-Cassel, where she had a mother. She told Audely that, but I can't help thinking that it was jealousy of Effrosyne that upset her in the first instance, apropos of the good graces of Anatole, who sends all the women wild. The attempt to bite looked like it, didn't it? And, not wishing to own it up to Anatole, she invented the fright-excuse. Any way, she presently subsided into mild sobbing and he, poor dear man, was very kind to her and lent

her his own pocket-handkerchief to dry her eyes on. But Audely thinks what really pacified her was his telling her that in the event of our going to war with her blessed country he would make himself personally responsible for her safe conduct home. Audely enjoys the personal friendship of the German Emperor, and stayed once in Unter den Linden. If I had thought of it I might have tried the same dodge. When you were a little girl, William Hohenzollern hired the *Isabel* of your father for two seasons. It was a yacht built only for two, really, but they crammed in far more. He had the best stateroom and the Empress and her boys slept on beds on the floor in the other. Arles was annoyed with him as a tenant, for he demoralized the crew, talking to them so familiarly. He seemed to have no idea of keeping in his place, or of seaworthy rules. It is ruinous for discipline, a man who comes up on deck before they are swabbed down ready for him, and insists on washing his hands out of the bucket the men use, out of condescension! And I bore him a grudge for stealing my cook, whose style he liked. It is difficult to imagine that a man can forget those things so entirely as to want to go to war with us. He gave us his photograph, signed, in a shoddy silver frame, as a peace-offering and wrote once a year.

Well, apparently he *has* forgotten all that. And I begin to wish I had taken a little more notice of the Army as a whole. I have never cultivated it; Venice doesn't care for soldiers. And it is no good for me to ask a man to dinner if my daughter insists on turning a shoulder—however white, as Bertie Corfe says—to him all the time! But if the Army is going to get some sort of show after all, she must mend her ways.

But who would have thought it? I remember at one of the reviews at Aldershot thinking to myself, as I watched all those poor dears drilled and dressed and smartened up to the last sword buckle, how pathetic it was to think that they would never see actual fighting. And now I have come to hope they will.

Indeed, though I must more or less play for safety in the Family Interest, I couldn't stand England's keeping out if there was serious oppression going on anywhere in Europe. St. George and the Dragon. . . . Princess Sabra, *i.e.* France, whom we *must* rescue. . . .

But between ourselves, Laura, Alsace-Lorraine is a deal

more than glory. Tell it not in Gath, but I haven't been a diplomat's wife all these years for nothing. It is far more : it is bread and butter to poor Princess Sabra and to us all ; coal and iron—the very sinews of war, in fact. I believe, secretly, we all know it while talking of, Honour and Pride and Glory and the rest of it.

Otherwise I am a bit of a Red Republican. Quenford used to tell me things. He was in Paris all through the Commune and the reprisals afterwards, and I don't think he at all approved of the severities of the man they used to call the Butcher Gallifet—a handsome ladies' man, whom I met afterwards, with his silver stomach. And I don't violently care about Servia and the way she murdered her Queen Draga, a common but harmless creature I would simply not have called on, as punishment. And Poland is so soft, and full of Art Students and musicians ; hardly a country one would have our strong men die for ! *Re* Alsace-Lorraine, I sometimes fancy France feels towards her lost provinces as I should if some one wrenched my mother's old tiara off my head violently, and wants them back as a decoration, more than anything else. I never see those statues in the Place de la Concorde and listen to the wind rushing through those dusty *immortelles* they keep hanging up there, without a shudder of premonition, as if it was the danger-point—the angry sore. . . . It is. I bet Germany sometimes wishes she hadn't wrenched the tiara from the forehead of La Belle France. It wasn't worth the row there has been about it.

However, I must not grouse too much. Diplomacy will get to work, and perhaps our bold statesmen will make Germany see that we are too dangerous a nut to tackle. No power in its senses can want three other powers all on her back at once. That consideration may make her pause on her mad career before more harm is done, and then we shall only be a few motor rides and horses shot in temper to the bad, and a lot of excellent drilling and waking-up to the good !

## VIII

### *From The Lady Venice St. Remy*

LOCHROYAN HALL.

EVER since Gerald's telegrams began to come we have been in such a state of ferment that to me life has for once seemed worth living. Europe butchered to make a Venetian holiday you will say, but you must kindly remember that in these letters I am only telling you exactly, more or less, how the odious, irresponsible animal called Venice Mahaud St. Remy really thinks and feels—without any of her moral inhibitions. Altruism in my acts you will please take for granted.

So now I will confess that when I open those buff envelopes at the breakfast table I feel the tense enjoyment of a Cabinet Minister making an authoritative speech. All eyes are fixed on me, waiting for me to read out the morning's bulletin, in a stillness so deep that you could hear a crumb drop, as Rowley Deane says; and if any one is so unequal to the situation as to put down a fork on his plate, and it tinkles, he or she apologises.

I am very grave. I am conscious of being concerned, however indirectly, in a great happening, in comparison with which my individual destiny and that of all those gathered round the table with me counts for nothing.

But these people are only grateful to me for the intelligence that I procure for them at nine a.m. instead of two p.m., when we do sometimes get a London paper or two. Yes, . . . I alone am conscious of my relative unimportance. I know I am like a worm in a cheese that is being rolled down a quay for shipment, or some small wild animal caught in the heavy machinery of civilisation that marches to time whether the poor beast can be disentangled or not. The usual absence of stops in the telegrams adds to their portentousness. To-day it was:

“Germany—at—war—with—France—and—Belgium—British—Navy—mobilizes—fifty—millions—voted.”

Of course the poor dears at the breakfast table, concerned with their dividends, fastened at once upon the amount of money voted, and discussed that to the exclusion of all else. Except Sir James Molendinar, Papa's crony—who knows I suppose as much, and more, than Gerald is able to tell us. He ought to be in London, but he is here because he has overworked lately. He never says anything, but goes on with his bread and "Cooper." Rowley Deane only thinks of the prospects of his profession, and whether the German Futurists won't oust the British ones. . . .

Next day the telegram was more exciting:

"Germany—fighting—Russia—official—invasion—of—France—defeat—of the—Germans—and—naval—fight—reported."

They all began then to chatter about the gunboat at Eyemouth harbour, the spies taken at and from Rosyth (some one had seen them handcuffed!), the shots some one else had heard quite clearly in the night blown on the wind from Berwick Law, where witches used to dance.

After that the talk turns to the problem of whether or no we are to be "dragged in." That chatter stops at once, I notice, when the boys come down. They will not hear of its being a matter for discussion even. . . .

"Not come in? Not help? Be beastly skrimshankers? Not if we know it! Not if we are alive!"

And they sit down and stoke furiously to keep up their muscle, and then troop off to tennis or badminton, which is all they can do nowadays to keep fit, since we have not enough petrol to send them in to golf at Kelso or Berwick. They start, first thing after breakfast, comparing muscles and pinching of biceps and slogging balls at the "beastly Germans." . . . The eldest of them, except Philip Wyandotte, isn't more than nineteen. Freddy White, Lord Athmare's son, the most swashbuckling and fire-eating of them all, is still at Harrow, and he writes and tells his father—who is only thirty-eight, that if he doesn't join up at once on the chance of Germany's violating Belgium, he, Philip, will be ostracised for having a skrimshanking Pater, and may as well resign his place in the football team at once! Lord Athmare, who it appears is indispensable to the management of his vast estates, writes back querulously to know if Freddy wants him killed in order to inherit them. They are an amusing pair. . . .

The mothers here are tolerably content to hear their boys talk like this, since they are all under military age. Freddy White, however, is a very tall boy, nearly six foot already, and could easily pretend to be twenty, and he means to do it, too. I sympathize with him. Any decent woman would. If I had a brother alive, I would give him to England cheerfully, and so I am sure would Mother. It is lucky perhaps that Romanille died.

I once at Tinsack had to witness the disgusting sight of my big nice dog Wallenstein fulfilling his beastly instincts and downing a rabbit at my very feet. The little animal lay prone under the paws of the big one, its eye glassy with fright . . . I called my animal off and got a man, who was mending the hedge near by, to come and knock the rabbit on the head and take it off for his dinner. . . . I feel now as if, should it come to the worst and Germany invade France through Belgium, that Belgium will be that rabbit. It will be quite helpless. It was fore-ordained that it should be helpless. Yet we must help it, for the honour of England; not run away as I did from the rabbit and get a man mending the hedge to come and finish it . . . which is what I suspect these people in their desiccated hearts would like to do?

They are all, with the exception of Rowley Deane and Mr. Biss the publisher, and perhaps the Indian Tremaines, people with a stake in the country, as it is called, *i.e.* dividends or landed property. And our rulers seem to be shepherds who think rather more of their flocks' safety and the chances of their getting through the hedge of a thorny time without losing any of their wool, than of keeping their honour untarnished. Dividends—with dishonour! Has a flock of sheep any honour? That is why it is eaten up, and deserves to be eaten up, in the end.

And what have personal impressions of Belgium and individual Belgians to do with it—if Belgium is in peril? . . . "I hate Belgians!" Lily St. Just says, pettishly. I suppose she once happened to have a Belgian cook who robbed her, or a parlourmaid who was dirty. I don't believe she has ever met a Belgian of her own class. I know some awfully nice ones. There is—or was, for perhaps he has been killed already—the Count de Crawhez, who was so anxious to let his château to us and go into rooms himself so as to be near me. He cared for me, but I did not think

it fair to encourage him. I forbade Mother to enter into any contract with him, however advantageous. She'd sell her soul to get anything for four guineas instead of five. But although I could not have married him, he was rather a dear. And the doctor at Spa—a perfect dear—with Alice, his French wife, with whom we all used to motor, times out of number, into Germany, to buy furniture—Mother's hobby—at Montjoie. We used to cross the frontier—always a fresh excitement for me—at Stavelot or Malmédy, a place I always felt fateful and intense about, because I confused it with Montmédy, where the French Monarchy died. Frontiers are exciting, because they are so unexciting! It doesn't mean a wall, or even a fence: just a dip in the road, and a little hut of sorts whence you expect a Moo! to issue. But on its plaster wall is the official *plaque*—the “squashed crow” of Prussia. Instead of a cow, a smart Prussian officer puts his head out and asks for all your names and addresses and occupations, and looks under the seats of the car to see if you have any contraband.

Going in, one had none, but coming back—trust Mother!

After that, it's Germany, but there's no difference: just another section of dreary heath, for all the world the same as that we have just traversed. But soon one begins to hear what we never heard in Belgium nor yet in France, a perpetual “Rub-a-Dub!” and bugle calls now and then coming out of the woods. We were told several times that there was a review of troops going on. Plenty of reviews, but we didn't see any, ever!

But what did strike me as rather martial and significant was the railway embankments stopping short of the frontier. And the sight of a harmless necessary wheelbarrow tipped over on the unfinished slope looking towards Belgium, as if a workman had left it ready for work to-morrow, gave me an uncomfortable feeling.

One always tells people these things after the event, so I suppose you won't believe that I thought anything of it at the time. But indeed I asked the Doctor about it, and he mumbled something about their not having the right to continue the railway *beyond* German territory, as if the subject was sore. . . .

Remembering all these dear people, the breakfast table discussion *re* “keeping out” is intolerable. I don't want



Englishmen to be killed too freely, but honestly, I don't think that a sharp, short brush with a civilised power would hurt us. It might perhaps do us good, after our petty tussles with naked savages at Isandlana and Tel-el-Kebir. And the civilians at home wouldn't feel it any more than they did then. In the Boer War I was too young to notice, but I am told that everything went on at home much as usual. Ilsa tells me that one week, indeed—the week of Spion Kop—Mother was very much depressed; but then she lost Lord Philpot, who was a great ally of hers, and a Darcie cousin went, and Papa's dearest friend, Colonel Foggarty, who liked you so much, Ilsa says. And Ilsa lost Paul *she* liked so much. But now, if it wasn't for reading the alarmist papers and the want of petrol for tooling lazy people about the roads that seems to worry Mother's hostess-mind so much—I use my bicycle—she would hardly know there was anything out of the way going on. We go about to parties in the daytime as usual, teas and tennises, choosing, preferably, houses that are within a walk. . . .

I am quite good now. I never talk of being a nurse or of going into a convent or the wilderness, or anything mad or philanthropic of that sort. Mother was becoming monomaniacal about me; I had to take her peace of mind in hand. The spectre of Ilsa, unwedded, rode her like a nightmare. So to reassure Mother and show her I was fully normal I took a leaf out of Ilsa's book and flirted a little, which is not so hard, now the chance of war has made men a little more interesting.

At the George Lysons' the other afternoon I felt suddenly very moved. We were all sitting, like the fringed border of a shawl, on our deck-chairs, round the smooth green tennis lawn, where a serious game was being fought out. The sun shone so softly and kindly that we did not need our parasols. The men not playing lounged on the grass at our feet. Mother and old Daddy Lysons were murmuring platitudes about the "golden afternoon." It struck me then, how like we all were to the men and women of the Decameron, who sat chatting, devising in a garden at Fiesole while people were dying of plague in Florence a mile away. One supposes that if it did come to that with us, the sun would still be shining on tennis courts and battle fields alike, and there would still be the cleavage between the people "out of it" and people "in it"—up to their necks. . . .

Yes, while Mrs. George Lysons went whining on to Mother about her hunter that the Government commandeered recently, and which she had shot—like Lady Calmady, as Mother was kindly telling her by way of consolation—I was watching the players in their coloured blazers and thinking that after all it would be a fairly simple transition from this little lawn to another wider one, raked and swept by grape-shot. Going through his paces in front of me, was young George Lysons, looking like the usual Greek god, but perfectly null, who had just got up from my feet to play against Belle-Belle, whom he was certain of beating.

We call young George "Big Sir Gervaise, that good knight," in my little court at Lochroyan. There is a good deal of him, and I am ashamed to say I was thinking what an excellent target he would make for a bullet. The blue and white stripes of his jersey—he is so large that, as Mother says, he can wear the loudest patterns without looking vulgar—kept shifting backwards and forwards over his muscles, that changed their form every time he lunged for a ball. I was talking to no one at the moment, and was bored by Mother's conversation with Mrs. George Lysons, so I watched the game and George's magnificent figure till I came actually to see patches of blood oozing out between the stripes, showing red on the white part and as a kind of sodden purple on the blue. I had to look away at last.

I wonder if it means that we *shall* fight and that Big Sir Gervaise is going to be killed.

Even Belle-Belle, whom he was beating, seemed to me a tragic figure. There is not an inch of Belle-Belle-Smith that hasn't been manicured, massaged, and cold creamed. Every hair on his well-shaped head has been cared for individually. But I hate to think even of that pink fondant of a creature being battered—massaged—into a pulp by a shell! . . .

Of course you will say that these reflections are morbid. I *am* morbid. Every thinking person, in my class at least, must be, or else the life we lead would stifle us. It is so hopeless—has been, at least—to try and get any normal sensation out of it.

But of course if war does come, every moment will be of acute interest and high sensation, though I hope I am not so selfish as to wish my country plunged into strife in order to afford me momentary excitement. For there's the mean

part of it ; that is all it would be for Us. We are too high and dry in our superior entrenchments to feel the horrors of war. So long as each knight banneret leads or supplies forty men out to fight for the King we shall have done our duty as a class. That, originally, was what we had to do in exchange for our feudal privileges. I learnt this at school. And we ladies, perched in our safe high castles, will lounge on arm-chairs and make banners and sleeves for our knights to wear in their heaulmes . . . and read novels from Mudie's, instead of sitting in a row and having them recited to us by ragged minstrels come in from the rain outside. Some one will tinkle a harp . . . and poor Jehane Du Castel Beau will go out into the garden and cut her throat with her father's sword because Gold Wings does not come back. . . .

And those that do come back to Ladies' Gard, we shall fuss over, and bind up their grievous wounds, and tend out of the knowledge we have all got from our Ambulance classes. Mary Scrymgeour was asked by the examiner what she would do if a child, its chest all raw with burns, was brought to her, and she said confidently, she would take a knotted towel and flick it until consciousness was restored ! In the Middle Ages, Mary's great-great-great-grandmother did better ; she took her knight's broken lance, anointed it and put it to bed, like the Ladye of Branksome—a sort of primitive faith-healing dodge which has always interested me. . . .

Audely says I am, like Juliet in the charnel house, playing madly with my forefather's joints, toying with the Spectre of War, and that I couldn't do it if I had the slightest idea of what it will be, if it is to be. . . .

I forget to tell you that Audely has materialized again. He came back from Bosnia yesterday, to Mother's intense jubilation. Poor dear, he has his work cut out for him, so many little things to ask him, so many jobs neglected during his absence, and he *must* know all about the war, coming straight from the Continent ! . . .

I have undertaken to police him, and I encourage his natural taciturnity, which is rather a relief in the midst of so much vague useless discussion. And I happen to know that my mother is dying to pump him about a matter that concerns him alone. He happens to have mentioned it confidentially in a letter to me which I left about. I am careless, because I have generally nothing to hide. If Mother chooses to

exercise her maternal rights of domiciliary visiting she must not be surprised if she is baffled by partial or scrappy information. She can't of course question me about it, but she *could* Audely, if she got him alone! I am trying to spare him that. Why should he be worried about a matter so entirely between him and me?

He and I are in that sort of sympathy that makes us like to be together for long hours without talking. Mother, when she is with him, and indeed with anybody, always seeks to draw the best out of them, *i.e.* what they think about the probabilities of war.

"Audely, dear, shall we really be forced to fight?" or "Audely, do you really think it necessary for us to take a hand even if there is war between France and Germany? We didn't before——" and so on, and so on. Sir James Molendinar has shut her up for good on the score of secret diplomacy. He *may not* tell. But Audely has no such responsibility. What he observes he can pass on as far as propriety is concerned. But he doesn't like to. When these onslaughts are made on him in public he contrives to look away, or look blank—of a blankness he knows how to make perfectly paralysing—but in private even he would find Mother impossible to evade.

We walked, Audely and I, to Kirkmichael yesterday in the soft blinding Scotch sunlight. I hadn't even a hat on. It took us two hours to go there and back. Half way there, Audely said suddenly, without looking at me,

"You must be awfully strong."

And when I said, "Why?" he wanted to know if I hadn't a headache.

I answered with literal truth, "*Jamais de la vie!*"

Silence. After another half-mile he observed:

"Well, if you can stand this without getting sunstroke you had better join my band of Cadets. I'm getting one up—though I'm afraid I shan't be able to see to them myself."

"I shan't join it if you aren't there to drill us!" I said, supposing he meant he would have to go back to look after the lady in Madrid. Then I asked him, just as Mother would have, if we should have to "come in"?

He turned a cold blue glare on me and said in his mild, even, low voice, as if he were reciting something to rather young children at a Village Reading:

“If you put it so I shall decline to be drawn into a discussion. If you like to say, do I think that we shall behave ourselves, collectively, as a nation, like gentlemen? I answer in the affirmative.”

I then told him an amusing incident that had happened the night of Lily St. Just's arrival. She had no maid, having lost hers, somehow, at Whittrick Junction. We sent Anatole for the creature, and he telegraphed to say she would be forwarded on here as early as possible in the morning, and he would see that she was all right. The sort of thing that *would* happen to Lily, to lose a smart foreign maid at a Scotch railway junction! She and Anatole will have the time of their lives; stopping at an hotel at Mother's expense! Perhaps they will be made to marry by Scotch law?

Any way, I had to lend Lily Berrymore and put up with the ministrations of the under housemaid—a girl we had brought over from France last year. She made a frightful muddle of the hooks at the back; but although I hate standing more than anything, I forced myself to put up with it. She was so long about it that I turned round and found it was because she couldn't see for tears. The poor girl had had a letter from home—Guingamp in Brittany—saying that both her brother and her sweetheart had been called up. I tried to comfort her, telling her it would soon be over, but she got quite hysterical, and finally dropped on her knees and sobbed out:

“*Miladi, Miladi, vous nous aidez, n'est-ce pas?*”

It showed how our ignoble preoccupation upstairs has permeated even to the servants' hall, and loses us prestige and honour there! These foreigners think we are scheming to leave them in the lurch! So I told Audely, who heard my little tale in silence. When I had finished he said, in the slightly grudging tone he adopts when moved:

“Well, next time Léocadie (how on earth did he know the girl's name? It *is* Léocadie, I remember)—next time Léocadie boggles at your dress fastenings, dry her eyes and tell her we are not going to desert her!”

Mother might have worked for days to get a direct statement like that from Audely, and would have been truly delighted to have heard it. For though she is a properly behaved hostess, and prefers not to go counter to the expressed feelings and wishes of her guests too obviously, in her sound heart of hearts she agrees with us, Audely and me.

We all three adore France and French people, for different reasons maybe. Audely and I because we are more concerned with matters of the spirit, and realize that every good thing in Literature and Art, nearly, comes to us out of France, and will be kept alive in France and only in France, if France is allowed to survive. Not, certainly, if the Germans get hold of her and impose their odious utilitarian civilization upon her. Oh yes, I know they are great chemists and metallurgists and do wonderful tricks with coal-tar products, but what is that to the Sainte Chapelle and Madame Bovary? What have the Germans really ever done for Art and Letters? The second part of *Faust* is the dreariest performance in the world, and the first part has only lived because it is mostly legend! And if they do get Paris, and the Sainte Chapelle is set alight again, that will be the end of it. Audely here mildly pointed out that it was French men and women who did it the first time; but I retorted that that was a mere consequence of the Siege, and the heated state of people's minds after a month's starvation. . . .

We had this little discussion at breakfast yesterday, and the mention of the Sainte Chapelle inspired Hermione Mackenzie to shriek out:

"That's in the Cité, where there are no shops, if I remember. But Suzanne's is in the Rue St. Honoré, and she is keeping three sets of my best ostrich plumes, until feathers are worn again!"

"Console yourself, Lady Mackenzie," Audely said (he hates Hermy), "they *won't* be worn again. The proletariat will put an embargo on them. And in any case your feathers will be spared, because the Germans will naturally begin with Belleville and the poorer quarters. By the time they get to the West End of Paris the ladies of London and America will have compelled us to cease hostilities!"

Papa, suddenly waking up, said, "Tcha! Hermy and her feathers! All is not lost even if Paris is taken. The Government would remove."

I don't think, however, that the old-fashioned politicians like Papa are in favour, ever, of giving unconditional support to other nations. They think so much of the responsibilities of Governments towards the mere material well-being of their peoples. It is Socialists who always seem eagerly to place their country's honour, in a vague high-falutin' way, before Everything! And carefully avoid defining Every-

thing! Mother thinks that Governments are there to manage things for people that people would be ashamed individually to do for themselves. Lord Granville, in 1870, was actually approached by the French Government, begging us to intervene to prevent the Siege. To think that if we had, the German Empire would perhaps not have got consolidated, and thus not have been in a position to threaten this sort of thing!

I don't believe that. Greed will out, all the world over!

I remember once sitting on the high golf links at Spa—with the Belgian doctor I told you of, and his wife. We had ordered a *cramique*, the local cake, which I adore. The prospect, miles and miles of it, was spread out below us, very green and bosky, with red, little, rather pretentious villas like the Bedford Park houses, spread out thin, like the currants in the *cramique*, but pretty evenly, all over the expanse. They looked so *riante*, prosperous and smug. . . . My friend said, very quietly and sadly:

“You look over the kingdoms of the earth and find it good. But I tell you, *moi qui vous parle*, that will all be fought over one of these days.”

A sinister speech, wasn't it? And I saw the green, for the moment, with the red dots of villas redder than before, like blood drops. . . . I really did. You will think I have nothing but warlike visions, now that there is talk of it. And I must say that he had been telling me beforehand about *les Grottes de Han*, one of the guide-book sights of Belgium, where there are in the catacombs heaps and stacks of craniums of dead soldiers—French or German, I can't remember which he said. Doubtless this coloured my vision. . . . but still. . . .

And now possibly he *is* being fought over. Perhaps he is killed? We can't hear of them. We wrote at once and offered them a home here until the troubles were over. No sign! I have still got Alice's hair brush she lent me when our luggage was all held up at Brussels and we arrived at the Laeken without a thing.

I was always losing things abroad, and in Germany, I must say, I generally got them back. Except in one case. I regret very much that if we do go to war I have been instrumental in providing one Prussian officer at least with a pair of excellent field glasses the better to kill us with. I left them in a train at Münster.

Looking back on it all, our comings and goings in Germany, I see that they always hated and suspected us. . . . Certainly, going so much off the beaten path as we did, we kept stumbling on military secrets, such as whole regiments quartered in clearings in lonely forests. The faces of the sentries when we walked up to them and asked them where we could get tea, and how they promptly detached an officer to follow us and see us safely off the premises! Audely says that we were "shadowed" the whole time last year. That is how he accounts for the extraordinary delays we had in getting carriages in any sort of time when one had ordered them—always, he says, the detective had to be waited for, who got on to the box beside the coachman and supervised our movements. I remember at Gravelotte—the battle field—how anxious they were that we should not cross the frontier, which sags about there like an eel. The Germans arranged it, after the battles, to take in all the burial mounds of Germans, who must on no account lie in official French earth. . . .

Oh yes, they hated us. No one ever smiled at us. Indeed, I never did see any one smile at all in Germany. They are a sour, dour, glum, sulky nation. On the face of it they are happy, at least well cared for. There are no abuses to rectify. But they evidently have not—I should say they were incapable of having—*la joie de vivre*. Perhaps now they are having the joy to kill.



## IX

### *From The Lady Arles*

LOCHROYAN.

You will have received the first wire about your father which Audely sent off yesterday. Now that things have settled themselves a little, I can find time to sit down to my desk and give you some idea of what happened. To begin with, it was entirely my fault. I accept full responsibility for my action ; its motive was absolutely pure—Venice ! My error was the result of my almost culpable fondness for that child and her welfare. But certainly I made a mistake ; Anatole was not, as it turns out, worthy. . . .

The doctor thinks that it is not nearly so serious as he at first feared. The poor darling has recovered consciousness, and the first person he asked for was his Wife. That was most forgiving, considering ! He has had a very slight stroke indeed, and it is the very first. It is only the third that proves fatal, as everybody knows. Arles will not leave us just yet.

All has been excitement, worry, and fuss ever since, naturally. But on the afternoon when the thing happened, we were as quiet as quiet. Most of our young men gone, of course, and Venice bored to death, and reduced to writing poetry in the daytime instead of by gaslight for a change.

Rowley Deane had left us and the portrait unfinished, the day before, and the Tremaines too. Arles had cashed a big cheque for them from our already slender store, just before he was disabled.

What with all this commandeering of cash, it has taken us altogether, so far, eighteen pounds to get rid of seven guests. Not one of them could have stirred farther than Berwick without our assistance. Except Rowley Deane, who seemed quite unaccountably to have plenty, and who was lending money right and left. I hear he tipped the servants most generously. Swagger, I suppose, but I rather like it, and I

shall let him see more of Venice when we get home, and perhaps finish the portrait in his own studio. Effel can go with her. And his kind of art may come to the top—if the war will let it.

I keep digressing to Venice, don't I? and of course what you want to know is how your father came to have a stroke. I have told you, I think, the geography of this place: how the lawn in front of the house commands everything—the gates of the Park, the servants' entry and ours. It is the key of the situation. Obviously Lochroyan was built for purposes of defence, so that all the outside property, cattle, etc., could be got into shelter, safe from the thieving Scots. I am confusing; in this case it would be the English who would be the thieves. One forgets one is "Across the Border and away," as the song says. There are some plane trees in front, nearly as tall as the central tower, which was all there was to Lochroyan in the moss-trooping days, and which has got embedded in the modern additions. And we were all sitting under these big trees waiting for our lunch. And marvellous to relate, Arles was with us, he and Sir James Molendinar having abandoned their cards for once. And a regular pair of owls they looked, both of them, blinking their eyes in the sun. But Arles has been advised by his doctor, who has been staying here, to allow himself a little more benefit of the fresh air and try being out a good deal, and I have insisted on his obeying Sir Lauder; so there he was, as good as gold. It is pathetic, in view of what came after!

He had borrowed the large green carriage umbrella from the coachman, and sitting under that, with his golden-whitey beard, I can assure you he looked fine. I am always so pleased when your father comes out into the light of day and shows people what a fine figure of a man he still is.

From where I sat, I saw three men enter the Park gates nearly a quarter of a mile away. Even at that distance, they had a sulky, reserved look, in their dowdy dark suits, that made me at first think of undertakers. They were obviously not gentlemen. Then it came to me in a flash that they were policemen in plain clothes. I am proud to think that I guessed at once, though there wasn't much to put me up to it, except that they seemed to nose about a good deal, and also were careful to close the gates behind them, which are always kept open.

Audely was away at Edinburgh for the day! My heart

was in my boots! For though we have of course, since the war scare, had plenty of officials out here, one way and another, they always come quite frankly and simply, don't you know, as if we were sure to be all right and it was a mistake, and they knew they'd get a drink and a shilling in the end. But these men were like people in a cinema film—sinister, still, and sneaking.

They parted company, as if by system, when they got nearer the house. One of them stopped and took up a position in front of the very unpretending door which, however, admits to the inner courtyard, and gives them the entire run of the back premises. He evidently knew the lie of the land! A little farther on another man broke away and passed straight on to the front-door steps and stood there, very stiff and still. The third man crossed the grass to where we were sitting. I was the only one of our group who could see him, for the moment. . . .

I could see that he was rather nervous, but full of pride of power. I guessed it was something fairly serious, and a hundred speculations passed through my mind, as at the moment of death, about what we had been doing to bring down on us the majesty of the law in this way. One idea I had was that they had come for Audely, who might have been getting into conflict with the authorities, in his irresponsible fashion, out there in Bosnia. I really, to do me justice, hadn't the least idea that I, personally, was going to be in it. Of course I did realize, as every one must, that be as careful as one may in these sort of times, one may have unconsciously knocked up against the law. One remembers De Maupassant's story of the two citizens of Paris who went out during the progress of the Franco-Prussian war to fish in the Seine, and got formally shot by the Germans for being out of bounds. They didn't know they were doing anything wrong. And it did just glance across my mind about the German servant girl Anatole got for us—there might have been something wrong with her registering, or so on. One never knows with foreigners. . . .

I was just calculating the distance at which I would rise from my chair and ask to what I owed the pleasure of this—unwarrantable intrusion—when the person saved me the trouble by going straight up to Arles, sitting a little apart from us all under his large green umbrella. It almost hid him, so I think it was rather clever of the officer to single

out the real master of the house at once and showed that he really did know his business.

He said something, low and quite civilly, to my husband, and Arles got up at once like a lamb, and not so very stiffly, after all. I never in my life so regretted the slight deafness that is beginning to overtake me, for as it was I could not in the least make out what was the force which made my decrepit old darling get up and precede the intruder into his own house—without cordiality, naturally, but without *rancune*.

I was addled. I said to Sir James, who was beside me, "Just a moment!" as if he was wanting to keep me or could have stopped me, and made the best speed I could after the pair. I suppose what I unconsciously used the expression to imply was that I desired my guests to remain seated and not make a scene, for I wasn't going to be put about. They took the hint. Ilsa and Venice, whom you might suppose would feel a little concerned, never budged—they were arguing with Sir James about whether you should say *blouse*, French fashion, or *blowze*.

Of course they hadn't seen the two men standing posted at the doors of the house like mutes at a funeral. And if they had I don't know that it would have made much difference. My people have got, as it were, their war-legs now, and it would take a good deal to scare them, or make them think that it was anything but the dear old Amateurish Government interfering with us for our good—and its own.

When I got to the house I saw that the man at the servants' entrance was out of sight—had gone right in—and the man at the front door had wheeled round and followed Arles and the first officer into the house. I couldn't catch them up till they were well inside and established in the big hall where we sit in the mornings, and where there is a swing door communicating with the servants' quarters. The man I had seen going in at the servants' entrance outside was mounting guard, posted against it now.

So there were three officers in the room with poor old Arles and me, quite enough to overpower us if we had thought of offering any resistance. We didn't think of it, of course. Although I am of an essentially combative nature, Arles' attitude of polite resignation gave me my cue, and I took it. I was merely glad that, as a woman, they didn't order me out of the room.

The man was speaking to Arles most respectfully when I sneaked into my own house, invaded thus by the hosts of the law.

"All British!" he was saying. "I can give you my assurance. I took care of that."

"Excuse me!" I put in. It was necessary. Arles was giving false information, and that is death in the eyes of the law. "Excuse me, Arles. You have forgotten Effrosyne!"

He didn't know anything about the insignificant German kitchenmaid, and I thought it wiser to keep her back for the present and not give them too much to think about at once. And of one thing I was sure, the woman was registered as an alien all right, and I even, in a flash, remembered her name—Bamberger.

Arles, without turning, just held up his hand, and addressed the officer,

"Lady Arles reminds me—a Greek lady's maid belonging to one of my guests," he said. "But there is no objection to your summoning the whole staff; none whatever."

"Thank you, my lord," the man said, most politely. "I need not say we accept your word, but we have had information which makes it necessary for us to see for ourselves. . . ."

"Of course! Of course!" Arles murmured, and became abstracted.

His head drooped. He was tired. He is an old man. He did not sit down, although he ought to have done so; it might perhaps have averted the catastrophe. He had not stood so long without an arm for over three months. I sidled up to him, ready to give him mine if he should need it, but he motioned me away by a very feeble gesture. I am so used to deciphering your father's moods that I at once realised that his vanity had come into play and that he did not want to seem in need of support before the eyes of all those men.

For there were a lot of men about now. Somebody had propped open the swing-door ready for the servants to file in, and in the dark space over their heads beyond I could see the faces of policemen in uniform, who must have come up the drive while I had been inside the house. I could have wished to have taken the whole business off his shoulders, but as it was I was glad, if he had to be disturbed, that Arles had come into the house with me, for if

he had been left outside there, he might have been upset by this cohort of strangers and not knowing what it was all about. Sir Lauder had warned me of shocks! . . . And to think that when it came, it was all brought about by me, who would have cut off my hand sooner than injure a hair of Arles' head! However, *che sarà sarà*, and it is *sarà* indeed. . . . But that it's only the first stroke is my one comfort.

Well, to resume. The servants began to file in—all women. Anyhow, Anatole was the only male *indoor* servant, and I was truly glad to remember that, although an alien, he was a friendly one. I had a sort of feeling, *even then*, that we should come to be distinctly enemies with Germany, if only because she has shown that she is bad-mannered among nations and won't treat or listen to reason. . . . What worried me then was that I realized how angry Arles would be with me for disobeying him about Anatole. I really then thought I was the person most to be pitied, and that even I should get off with a good talking to. I would plead a woman's age-long privilege of duplicity in household matters. Feed the beast, you know! In this case the poor little beast was Venice, who was sitting calmly out there flirting, *faute de mieux*, with Sir James.

Effrosyne and the Bamberger woman happened to be pushed in together, to Effrosyne's evident disgust, for I saw her holding her skirt away, so that it should not graze the kitchenmaid's. She couldn't avoid it, however; policemen are no respecters of the etiquette of the servants' hall, although I noticed that she seemed on very good terms with the officer, who asked her her name or names, of which she had about a dozen. She stood free, while a policeman had hold of the kitchenmaid's arm all the time. That poor body looked frightened to death, and kept her eyes fixed on Effrosyne as if she was fascinated. She gave her name. It *was* Bamberger, and she came from Marburg in Hessen Cassel. The policeman still held her, while next came old Maggie Hepburn, the one servant I had kept on at the Musters' request as cook-housekeeper, and to see that we didn't abuse our privileges in any way. I must say that I had often regretted it, for she has a vile temper, and kept having the most fearful rows with Anatole all the time.

She was asked if she was the cook. They had had six girls up already, and none of them had answered in the affirma-

tive, and I suppose they were beginning to wonder who provided for our poor insides.

Maggie it was who gave me away.

"Nay, Nay!" she said in her broad North-country accent. "Wor cook's a man!"

Arles gave me a puzzled look, but said nothing. I saw then it must all come out in about a minute, and braced myself. Maggie evidently had a "down" on Anatole, for she went on, in a loud, eager voice:

"And he's awa'—cut his sticks (*i.e.* run away) ower the wall of the laundry-huse——"

"Quite so!" said the officer. "But we've got him. Here he comes!"

And sure enough, Anatole, in his blue serge suit, with his knees all over whitening from the walls of the laundry, was shoved in, with two policemen holding up his arms. He seemed dazed, except for his blue eyes that flashed. . . .

"This is the man we want," the officer said to Arles. "Anatole Franz Bamberger. And this person will be his wife Margarethe. . . ."

He looked at a paper he had in his hand. The policeman who was holding the kitchenmaid gave her a nip, to show he had got her safe, I suppose. But she hadn't moved. She was staring at Anatole, who never, I can swear, looked at her again. His eyes were fixed on Effrosyne. I shouldn't like a man to look at me like that, especially if he had eyes like Anatole. It was as if he hated her, and yet wanted to get to her. . . .

But my attention was soon taken off these wretched people by the sound of a deep groan close beside me. Arles had fallen down on the carpet like a log.

It's only the first stroke, I hope you understand, Laura, and that it isn't serious. But it was my fault that he had even this, and I think you must forgive me if I don't write much more to-day. Of course you realize that it was Effrosyne who warned the police, out of jealousy. I can't imagine why Anatole brought the wife on here, for he was already in love with the Greek maid, and it was asking for trouble. I suppose he wanted to make Effrosyne jealous, and the weapon turned against himself. Clever men—Anatole is a clever fellow, and I maintain it, though he might have put his talents to better use—clever men are apt to spoil the best-

laid plan by doing something foolish connected with their private life. I have always noticed it. Look at the number of public men who have lost name and fame and position through an entanglement with some woman! I don't myself think it ought to be taken into consideration. Why should the nation lose their services because they've had two wives or so at once? Do you remember I told you how Anatole's wife had that fit of hysterics, and Anatole could not console her, because he had to pretend not to know a word of German, and I had to get in Audely to hush her up? . . . Audely tells me now that he had his suspicions from that day, and that it was he who put it into Sir James' head to want to play bridge in a darkened room with the windows and doors shut. He knew that the two old political dodgers would get talking politics, and that the best way to prevent casual eavesdropping would be to invent a fad for them which would allow them to hermetically seal themselves up for whole days. For of course they didn't play much bridge, but talked all round and over things. Though when I asked Sir James about it he laughed and said nonsense, every sensible man *did* prefer bridge to golf, and artificial light to daylight!

I am frightfully disappointed in Anatole. Not that that will break his heart, for he will be shot. I am certain of it. He has a doomed face. Audely tries, kind creature, to comfort me, saying that I need not take it so hardly either about my husband or my servant. Arles' affair is quite slight, and Anatole won't get more than twenty years at the most. I am not to suppose, he says, Anatole was necessarily wanted as a spy; he was known to be a notorious thief and murderer. All this is to make me regard Anatole as unworthy. Maybe; but if he is shot, his blood will be on my head as well as Arles' stroke. . . . And any way, no one likes the idea of a murderer being taken in one's own house. I should never have given him up. The laws of hospitality would have precluded it, so there, I said; and he said no more.

Venice is in an awful temper, because she wasn't even in the room when he was taken. That's all she thinks about the poor man who has cooked for her faithfully for nearly a year. She says that one way and another she is missing all the good things of life. She tried hard to get speech of Anatole, as I indeed did, but they denied it to both of us. He was taken away handcuffed.



*From The Lady Venice St. Remy*

PARK CRESCENT.

[*Note by Mrs. P. Quinney.*—This is the end of a long, dull screed, dated from Park Crescent, August the fifteenth, in which my poor Venice delivered her unquiet little soul, disturbed and put out of its usual selfish rut by these world happenings. It strikes me rather as the swan song of her girlhood—her pedantic devitalized girlhood, full of unrealities and carefully nursed half-lights and half-knowledges. And the end of the letter, written after the Declaration of War by her country on Germany, might be said to embody, ever so slightly, the throes of her rebirth into a horrible real dull world where people will have something else to think of than Lady Venice St. Remy's mental development. I gather they travelled back to town on the very day of the Declaration. It seems to have stunned Venice a little, for she evidently forgot to post this letter, which she had begun at Lochroyan, in the excitement of it all. Mother's frantic efforts to find a *remplaçant* for Anatole merely amuse Venice, but from the short notes which is all my Mother vouchsafed me at this time I gathered that the loss of a good cook, though it weighed with Mother, did not occupy her generous imagination so much as the tragic circumstances of his arrest and Papa's stroke, for which she blames herself. She talks a deal of nonsense about it and her own bad behaviour *re* the concealment and harbouring of the fellow. Sir Audely Bar had very kindly written to me, supposing that I should probably like a more coherent account of the affair than I have got from my mother and Venice. He seems a kind man. He says they are all wrong about Anatole's being arrested as a spy—how could he be, before any Declaration of War?—but he dare says Anatole is one all right. The

police wanted him badly on another count; and though he won't be shot, and there is no need for them all to go seeing him in their dreams, he will probably get twenty years. And Papa is going on well. The doctors say he might have had the stroke any day this last year or so, and was, according to them, queer for a week before, if Mother had only thought of it. So I must believe, no matter what she tells me, that his seizure was indicated, and had nothing particular to do with the shock of discovering Mother's little *supercherie*.]

. . . It is really very sad to think how owlish we all were these last days, not realizing how "the little fuss in the Balkans," or the "tit-up at Sarajevo," as Mother used to put it, would mature into this! Papa predicted it. Yes, he said several times over, shaking his head, "After Sarajevo anything may happen!" He was far too decent to remind us of it, through those dreary days when we all lived on the newspapers and on telegrams. Poor old darling, like the prophetess Cassandra he foretold the ruin he could not avert for himself. After all, he was one of the people who built up the circumstances which led to it all—he was one of the Diplomatic corps who made *la pluie et le beau temps*! And even when we *were* warned—we had our spies and newspaper screech owls—what could be done? The House would not have liked voting enormous increases in the Army and Navy Estimates, which was the obvious course to take, and then be kicked out of office for it by an ungrateful nation of taxpayers! And it is so soon too late! Even if you receive hints of the coming of an earthquake, you can do nothing to prevent your house falling!

And now it has fallen with a vengeance. It has broken up all our federations for comfort, ruined all the little corners in prosperity engineered for themselves by cute people, submerged in a roaring sea of discomfort and death all the little islets on which the prudent souls who look ahead built their house of happiness. . . .

I can't say I did look ahead, or make any reservations whatever. I expected all good to come to me—always. I just lived *au jour le jour* of culture, and comfort, and all that makes existence worth while—pleasant living, interesting people, books. . . . Like Caliban, "so long as I sucked from the filth my prog"—excuse the plain-spokenness of Browning: to the bourgeois at least, Futurism and decadent

poetry and the Stage Society *are* filth—I was content. I made Mother take this house. She didn't want to. Papa didn't want her to. I got her to ask people she didn't particularly like. No matter; I just thought of having the kind of time that appealed to me—a silly, unreal, affected time, swaying idle, worthless people to my own idle, worthless will. Playing at mediaevalism was harmless enough, but—never again! . . .

Why, fatuous as it all seems now, I had started a Court of Love, where I was Queen. Trust me to take *le beau rôle*!

Mother was pleased, for it kept me quiet, though she was a little afraid at first that the mediaeval business "might lead to license." Only I was so very serious about it, and the young men and maidens played up, and didn't lark too much or do anything undignified. I had thought of it all as soon as we took Lochroyan, a lonely house in a lonely neighbourhood.

The ancestral château in Provence put it into my head—Romanille, that the eldest son takes his title from. That was about all we knew about it, till we went to stay there. . . .

I saw it at sunset time, every day from St. Rémy. It looked like a sheet of water, wan and white, flowing down on the shadowy sides of the Alpilles, on the road towards Orgon. And one day I persuaded them all to walk out that way and discover what the appearance could be. How I wish people would be quiet when they are out on an adventure of discovery! My people talked and rattled alpenstocks. . . . And when we got near we found the grey surface was the home of our race, the donjon wall of our castle of Romanille pressed against the sides of the mountain, and that the sun caught every afternoon. The people in the *mas* below called it the Château d'Amour still. . . .

This Northern place has not the magic of the South, but it has an old kernel in the heart of its modern Gothic. The French tourelles and crow-stepped gables are good imitations. I have elected to think of it as the "castle in the walled garden";—

". . . where no drop of blood  
 Drawn from men's bodies with sword blows  
 Came ever there, or any fear.  
 Most certainly, from year to year  
 'Twas pleasant as a Provence rose.

There were five swans that ne'er did eat  
 The water weed, for ladies came  
 Each day, and young knights did the same,  
 And gave them cakes and bread for meat."

We did that. I and my Meinie of maidens walked out to the mere and fed them every day. As a matter of fact, there were two swans instead of five. They are on a lonely mere—I refuse to call it a loch—about a mile on the road to Kirkmichael, just the right distance for "Miles, and Giles, and Isabeau, and big Sir Gervaise, that good knight, and many dames with footfall light," to stroll out to in the summer evenings that are so long and late in the North.

I took so much trouble to get it up properly! The boys and girls were nearly all staying in the house; only when I saw any one I thought would fit in I commandeered him, as I did young George Lysons of Aldivalloch after I had seen him play tennis at his mother's house, and heard the old Duchess of Castiglione predicting an early death for him. He exactly did for "Big Sir Gervaise," and all the girls promptly fell in love with him and wanted him for their own special knight. But I stood no nonsense of that kind, and apportioned their lovers to them according to the poem and picturesque propriety.

And now he is gone. Nearly everybody is gone. I could kill myself. The girls were hustled away by their mothers in the South, who sent telegrams saying that Fair Ellayne-le-Violet and Mary Scrymgeour and Alice of the Golden Hair—a very stupid girl I didn't miss—must come home at once because travelling was going to be so difficult. Zoë Courtauld had no mother to worry her, but she went all the same. She is a restless being.

The maidens were nearly all pretty, in their own ways—carefully chosen as a foil to me, Ilsa says, but really that wasn't it. They happened to be all my own friends that I had had for ages, and some of them relations that Mother asked without consulting me. She had to ask them, or we should never have heard the end of it from Aunt Minna. When I got them down here I organized them and re-christened them out of the poem. Ellen Reveley was Fair Ellayne le Violet. I called her that because Ellayne is the old spelling of Ellen, and because of her violet Irish eyes. "Mary"—my cousin Mary Scrymgeour—didn't need re-christening at all; her name is as old as the hills. There has

always been a Mary Scrymgeour at Sockburn since Henry II, and she was to the hennin born, as we found when we began to dress up. Constance Fille-de-Fay was naturally Zoë Courtauld, whom you saw two winters ago in America, where I understand she made her name and a fortune telling fortunes. She does that here. She tells us that she is a changeling—and dresses like a witch, with her black hair in elf-locks—tidy elf-locks, or else Mother would be down on her. Mother always tells girls quite frankly if their hair is wrong or their nails want cutting, and so on.

But in spite of Mother's good-humoured dragooning and occasional peevishnesses, when we were *too* mediaeval and the Musters' agent might have objected, we were very happy, all of us, talking about Love with buttons on our foils, don't you know, lest we got pricked, and dressing up in the evenings to give it all *vraisemblance*, and sometimes even in the daytime. We could not quite get the boys to play up in that particular; they were rather shy of the two legs of different colours and the velvet shoon with points turning up at the toes. Though Bertie Corfe, for a bet, went with Ellen and Zoë, in full mediaeval costume, as far as the swan's pond, and sat in the boat, which first had to be baled out, for a full hour, reading sevenpennies, as a protest, while the people walked past to church and stared at them. All round here they thought us quite mad, till in self defence Mother had to make us promise not to go beyond the lodge gates in our hennins.

And when the boys all began to go away, it was just like the scene in *Gold Wings*, when Ladies' Gard had to "meet the war." Morris must have been a prophet. There was "O poor Mary, weeping so," because she was afraid she wouldn't get back in time to see her only brother who was going off somewhere at a moment's notice. And "wretched Constance Fille-de-Fay," who has got a wild, unkempt sweet-heart who is a professor of English literature somewhere in Germany, and will, of course, be interned, or worse, the moment war does break out. Ellen Reveley hadn't any one official to worry about, but she had grown very fond of Big Sir Gervaise, and before he went that cruel little Zoë saw things in his hand which Ellen guessed, from her manner, were not pleasant, and it didn't make her any happier. But she isn't passionate. Philip Wyandotte tried to substitute himself after George left, and if anything happens to George,

I expect Ellen will console herself with him, although she roared like a baby when Zoë told her that she would be married three times.

The week of departures has been rather heart-rending. All these gay, reckless, unwitting boys caught up, as it were, from their innocent games and lovmaking into the toils of "Destiny"—the tune we used to waltz to. The big hall is so empty now that one's footsteps, crossing the parquet, set up a hollow reverberation; it was once so full of noise and clatter as to be almost joyous, though the occasion was not so. There they were, these fine strapping young fellows, shouldering their suit-cases—for they all had to walk to Kirkmichael—waving their long arms full of luggage at us women hanging over the banisters, shouting, "So long! So long!"

They were off, they declared, to try to get a good slash at the Huns—to be killed for us, perhaps? They were so happy, too much above themselves, some of them, even to say Good-bye properly or thank their hostess. Dark, tall Archie Dunkeron wrung Mother's hand till he drove all her rings in and hurt her; he was perfectly speechless with emotion, though he always is, without emotion, and he is only going back to Paris to my uncle's.

I made a bad break. I called out in the middle of the row:

"I declare, you are all making a beano out of getting killed."

Ilsa reproved me, and then went off to her own room and cried. I suppose the word "beano" shocked them . . . applied to a serious matter as this may prove to be. Ilsa is really very soft-hearted, while Mother and I are more or less philosophical. Mother just sticks their lunches into their bags and the soda waters they don't want to have to carry, and kisses—some of them—good-bye and goes about her business as usual. She seems, these days, chiefly concerned with the Lochroyan commissariat. She is collecting eggs to lay down in water glass for the winter, from all round the neighbourhood. She is awfully afraid of a famine later on, or at all events a scarcity. But she has installed a *prie-Dieu* thing in her boudoir, and takes Prayer Exercise just as she used to take her health exercise on the leather horse in the dining-room at Beardmore for a quarter of an hour before breakfast.

I can't pray. I don't know how it is, but I feel numb, and as if it wasn't God's business to meddle, and rather indecent of any one to ask Him to. He doesn't interfere when animals fight, but lets stags buffet each other until their horns interlock and they die in agony. Perhaps that is what is going to happen!

I have to go by myself to feed the swans now—or rather the one swan, for its mate has died. Neglect, I suppose, in these stirring times. Not my fault, for once!

I go pretty often. The thought of the swan, lonely and proud, dipping its yellow beak, preening its useless white wings, swimming aimlessly hither and thither on the glassy pool, gets on my nerves until I go and succour it. It once was cherished by all the Meinie, and now there is only Poor Jehane du Castel Beau who feeds it, and she will not do it for long. . . . We shall leave this place . . . .

Meantime I wander out along the straight white road until I see it looming like a ghost, a mile in front of me. It is like a silvery eidolon on the brown background of the mere. Its long neck sways spiritlessly as I approach. Though it isn't like a dog, whom one is sure actually *cares* to see one, still I fancy the creature knows me, and is graciously, morbidly, interested to survey me with its cold glassy eye set in yellow. . . .

Sometimes on Sundays, when I am with the swan, the hymn from the little conventicle near by pours out in a self-satisfied drone, raucous and soothing, as if nothing mattered any more in this topsy-turvy world except ancient custom and habit. . . . And there is the boat too, that we used to sit and read in. It wants a coat of paint to bring it up to the standard of the poem, and I try to think that I am afraid that if I look too closely I shall see “a slain man's stiffened feet. . . .”

I suppose you will like me to turn from these sick fancies to something more healthy and actual. The affair of Anatole is as dramatic as a transpontine melodrama! I take it for granted Mother will have told you all the medical details of Papa's seizure, which luckily does not turn out to be as serious as we at first feared. It was, I believe, half of it rage at discovering that Mother had been disobeying his orders. Papa does insist, in the last resort, on being master in his own house. Mother's way is not his way, though she

is determined to get it, and is usually quite good at circumventing him.

But this time she was caught. She had not taken into account the fact that the country can't afford to harbour clever spies because they happen to be clever cooks as well. I personally would rather have lived on bread and water than keep a traitor about me, but I wasn't consulted. I only knew that for reasons of her own Mother was defying Papa's orders, as many a time before. I dare say I profited, indirectly. I am greedy, and Anatole's *cuisine* appealed to me, and I have no doubt Mother was all the time thinking of that, for she doesn't care in the least what she eats. But she is always so anxious to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds that now and then she comes to grief and gets no thanks either. *Ainsi va le monde!*

Apart from the damage to Papa, I don't suppose there has been much harm done. Anatole wouldn't have been able to do much with us. What could he glean from the reading of the correspondence and listening at doors to the talk of an old diplomatic man, long years out of his "shop," and an indiscreet middle-aged lady who was never trusted with state secrets, at the best of times?

I sometimes wonder if the well-known fact that Sir James Molendinar (Mother's great pal before Audely) is Elsa's godfather and Papa's crony, and has a house at Hayward's Heath where all the Ministers come for golf as a relief from their labours, was what influenced Anatole to try to enter our service, for certainly he did try, although Mother imagines that she simply sneaked a good cook from De Crawhez. Perhaps Anatole engineered it all, practising on one of Mother's well-known weaknesses. He certainly put himself in our way and paid me compliments about my greediness which he adored, and actually flirted with Mother, if you can imagine it, in a subtle and properly humble way. He made great friends with Berrymore, so she tells me now, and created a *pâté de lièvre* with his own hands which he got her to convey to *la charmante Miladi Anglaise* as a testimony of his powers and his devotion.

It all comes back to me. . . . Also Mother's reputation, which Berrymore doubtless spread abroad to give herself consequence, of being easy with servants and allowing them all their liberty so long as they were there when she wanted



and did their service properly. And he made Mother get rid of all the footmen !

Papa and Sir James must have annoyed him with their secret conclaves in the morning-room behind the hall, with the blinds down and the lights turned up, while they ostensibly played bridge from morn till eve. Audely says he gave Sir James the tip to do it. From the very beginning Audely has had his suspicions, but like every one else regarded the matter as of no importance so long as we were on friendly terms with the Continental powers.

One used to speak loosely of any rather *louche* person as a "German spy," and not really mean it. One of Audely's vices is omniscience. He would have liked to get us all to believe that it was he who had put the authorities on to Anatole, but we all know it was Effrosyne, Lily St. Just's Greek maid, who told on Anatole to pay him out for getting his wife to join him here. I suppose it did not occur to Effrosyne that Anatole might desire merely a confederate for the furtherance of his political plans. I have no doubt he was using Effrosyne as well ; a jealous woman can always be worked through her passions, and a good servant of his country, as Anatole undoubtedly was, would sacrifice Love to business any day.

I and Effel have been looking all over this house for a wireless installation. Anatole might easily have managed it. He was never interfered with, and was always going into Edinburgh or Peebles for the day and night, and could have secured the plant for it. But as to setting it up himself, I don't fancy he is expert with his hands, which I have noticed are small, rather fat, and boneless—the hands of an artist. He was an artist, and I am sure was one to the very end.

I regret immensely that I happened to be in the garden, talking social inanities to Sir James—one would think he was interested in keeping me there, for as a rule he never bothers to talk to me, so that I detest him—while the tragedy of Anatole was being played. I am dreadfully vexed, for all I can get now is Mother's garbled account of the scene. She could only think of the coming fuss with Papa, and was not taking in the tableau at all.

But it was impressive : trust Anatole for that ! From what I hear I can reconstruct it for myself, to a certain extent, and I will set it down for you.

I see our whilom cook standing, dark, dignified, and sinister, like a black Christ, between two women, his wife and the woman he loved. They say that his magnificent eyes remained absolutely fixed in their stare; never released those of the impassive devil who had ruined him. And I see on his other side the lumpish figure of the German woman he had married, laying on him, with equal intentness, her faded blue ones, adoring him *quand même*! And Effrosyne, who has given him up to death, probably adores him too in her own savage way. She would, as I do, admire his bravery, even though he was caught trying to run away in order to save himself and go on fighting for his country. That is what I can't get any of them here to realize, that a spy is a soldier, brave, and braver than any other soldier, since in his case detection means certain and ignominious death.

The wife-creature was quite stupidly resigned I hear, after the first shock, and willing to stop on here if it could have been arranged. . . . She is not interesting. Effrosyne is. I meant to get a long talk with her before she went back to town with Lily, who wouldn't be parted from her for the world, no matter what crime she had committed. I hear, if she had stayed, the other servants intended to put her into Coventry for what she did do, although they now pretend they detested Anatole! The soul of a servant! What a welter!

I did get hold of Effrosyne for a moment while she was folding up one of Lily's nightgowns—what there was of it. The poor girl seemed to be catching clouds, and trying to pin them down. I asked her bluntly, as I fancied she would like, if she thought Anatole would be shot! She answered curtly, "*Ca m'est égal*," and added in part English that he had "*behave like a sale cochon*." I admired her concise brutality.

The net outcome of all this tragedy is, that we have no cook. Mother is half distracted. It is all nonsense, for Papa can eat nothing but slops, and old Maggie can do what he wants. The George Lysons offer to take in Ilsa, and she can walk in to Lochroyan every day and send us a bulletin. For we are to go back to town on Tuesday, and return on Friday with the cook Mother fondly hopes to procure. I shall *not* come back, if I once get home again. I could go to the Leahys. . . .

We went up yesterday. Travelling, let me tell you, is getting most inconvenient. We had to get to the little station at Kirkmichael quite early, walking in, instead of, as usual, motoring to Berwick. The alternative was to sit on top of our luggage on the lorry. At Kirkmichael we had to take a little slow drawing train that stopped at all the stations and took up mild black women with bundles, and discontented-looking farmers, as far as I could make out. Nobody like ourselves.

At Berwick the papers had come in and the placards were full of shrieks. The ultimatum to Germany was to expire at midnight—eleven o'clock, to be precise.

There was the greatest excitement!

It made every hour of that day, winding to an end, the minutes as it were ticked off to the grunt of the sleepers as we ambled along to the heart of affairs, memorable—a piece of existence one was proud to live through. At least that is how I felt. Mother was fussy as usual, and insisted on our eating sandwiches in the train as usual, a thing Audely and I both hate, but have to give in to. Audely sat like a self-satisfied sphinx all the way up except at the changes, when Mother, as usual, made him useful.

Then he did his work, looking after the luggage, tipping porters, getting us coffee, in the same dreamy way, with a cigarette between his lips as if he didn't know it was there. How Audely ever manages travelling, how he ever pulls anything off or gets anything through, puzzles me, although Mother, who knows her Audely *au fond*, reposes on his efficiency like a bird on the breast of a halcyon calm, and says that he has never, so far, failed her.

I was thankful that I didn't have to sit on a soldier's knee and take another on mine, which is what had befallen Rowley Deane on his journey South, the day before. (He was there all through that row. We forgot him, and he took no notice of it.)

One feels rather greedy sitting in comfort, so Mother observed—she has such a kind heart—while the men who were going to fight for us, and perhaps going to be killed, should have to sit three deep on narrow seats, with nowhere to put their legs. Audely remarked that they took it out in having all the windows shut, which they adore. Then Mother said they had to do that to prevent themselves from falling out of the train. *And they argued! . . .*

We got to King's Cross about five, and Audely put us into a cab with an air of forwarding us to our destination, and went to Arlington Street to get his letters. The lady in Madrid must be writing every day. . . . I suppose he will go to her. And Mother will be hugely annoyed. . . .

In half an hour he came along to Park Crescent and asked us for a bed, or at any rate a dinner. His valet, that he has had for twenty years, has gone—enlisted, Audely charitably supposes, though, as Mother remarked, there are other reasons for servants running away! Audely said that he hadn't thought of looking to see if anything was missing, but he was hungry, and there didn't seem to be a soul in the place to boil him an egg, even, and that would have been absurd anyhow, for he knew we had supplies and he was quite equal to cooking and serving up a five-course dinner if put to it.

I knew by Mother's face, that Audely never looks at, that she was disappointed. There wasn't any dinner here, either. What Mother, knowing Audely was coming back for us, had hoped, and intended all along, was that the useful creature should take us to dinner at the Carlton Grill. She tried her best to get Audely to do this, even at the last minute, saying that what she wanted was a boiled custard. She knows that that very English concoction is out of Audely's range. . . . But Audely can be mulish if he likes, and with a charming grace set his will against hers.

He sat down, stretched his legs, lit a cigarette, and said that if there were eggs in the house, or eggs could be procured, he could make her her custard. She couldn't object any more; Audely hadn't got the restaurant itch to-night, as she had. For me, I thought it would be far more fun to stay at home and have a picnic dinner than go to the Carlton, where one has been so often as to feel almost as if it were home. And I believe there are people to whom a restaurant dinner is an event and acts as a filip!

Our basement is a *terra incognita* for me. I don't believe I have ever been in it. Nor, I fancy, has Mother, very often.

Down we went, Audely and I. We got hold of the caretaker, one of Mother's charities, an old pensioner past her work, but who has been about the place for years, and made her tell us where things are kept. And while Audely was chaffing her and listening to "her story"—he always does; it propitiates people and makes them look after him better; in her case, produce clean saucepans—I wandered about in

the catacombs, the Hades where I begin to perceive such quantities of our fellow creatures are doomed to spend their shapeless, dreary, inartistic lives. No wonder the women clamour for "days out," and lots of them; no wonder Anatole sandwiched spying into his day's work, that he might not die of decay and inanition! I noticed the pantry, where he slept—in a little cell off it, of course—so as to take care of the plate. Do you know I find I had always thought of "plate" as china, cups and saucers, and so on, and wondered why butlers needed to sleep on top of the dinner service so as to guard it with their bodies against thieves.

Well, our plate was intact; not a spoon missing! Anatole had higher matters to attend to. The German Government didn't need our awful epergnes and wine-coolers and cake-baskets. I don't wonder. And I insist on believing, whatever Audely may say, that Anatole, who served us with one hand and betrayed us with another, is cold and stiff by now, and that the Greek girl sees him in her dreams. Mrs. Huggins—that is her interesting name! so Audely discovered—said that there were a lot of locked boxes—what she called "attash cases"—under his bed, of which the police at once took possession when they searched the basement the other day. She told Audely that "it come all over her suddenly when the men come asking for Mr. Bamberger's papers."

She knew that was his real name, and supposed we knew. She did like him onst; she didn't like him now—Ho, no! The echo of the servant crowd at Lochroyan!

She is, as usual, wise after the event. She always thought there was something wrong about 'im. He so often stayed out all night; and if not all night, all day, and came home, bringing in queer sorts of men, and then they stayed shut up for hours in his little study. He had a study, with an exquisite little gas-stove in it on which he "finished" sauces. Mother spoiled him, so that no one ever dared to speak of his goings-on to her. She wouldn't have listened to a thing against him. The other servants were all jealous, and said that if we chose to trust a foreigner we must just take our chances.

Audely sent her out for a couple of chickens, and he would do them *à la Magyar*, if there was some Nepaul pepper in the house, which there was. And the Huggins had to run and get cream at the dairy round the corner. You should

have seen her eyes when he talked of a gill of cream and a teaspoonful of pepper to each chicken! And Mother was to have her boiled custard. I banked on the Magyar Chicken. Then he sent me to rummage for one of Papa's nightshirts to put over him to keep his clothes clean. I found him one—of mine!

In it Audely looked extremely odd, but so serious and intent on his work that one couldn't laugh at him. He had completely subjugated the "char," who went about eyeing him as if he was a good but jealous God who might strike her dead with amazement at any moment if he were annoyed, or if she handed him a dirty saucepan. Poor soul, in the course of chaperoning us two she listened to *des choses à faire frémir*, which passed over this poor slave of the gas-ring as unheeded as if they had been pronounced in another tongue.

Laura, you know the game of Analogies. One thing suggests another and each person carries the idea on a stage till at the end you come to something so different that you wonder how you got there. From Boiling-over to Love! That is where Audely and I got to. Love is, more or less, Audely's forbidden subject. I know why: because he is incapable of it, in spite of the lady in Madrid.

"O Love! Love! Love! O, withering might!" Do you know those lines, so simple, stupid, and inartistic, fill me with a kind of passionate awe. Poetry has, I believe, nothing to do with the intellect; it is the mere collocation of words, accidental, associative, instinctive, that has power to stimulate emotion in the hearer.

I was mesmerized by the recurrent whirr of the metal spoon scraping on the floor of the saucepan, and Audely's patience exhibited in the slow constant action. And perhaps the gleam of the big brass surfaces of the copper vessels hung on the wall over our heads. . . .

We were alone in that vast cavernous kitchen. The "char" was clattering pots and pans fearfully in the back kitchen, afraid for her life of disturbing Sir Audely and Lady Venice at their mysterious incantations.

For every time Audely took the lid off his pan or shook it, there was a wild burst of frizzling, as if all the devils in Hell, provoked by him, were shouting and their victims protesting! . . . Yet he was only making Mother's innocent

custard according to promise. Our eyes were fixed on the yellow surface where, he explained to me, the first bubble would signify "coming to the boil," and then curdling, whatever that is. The oncoming of boiling is very subtle, and he just had to look out and remove the pan before it happened. Quite an amusing game!

Several times he or I saw the danger coming and just lifted the pan off in time. . . .

I thought it would be rather fun to spoil that custard, as it certainly would be, if I began to talk about subjects that bored him, such as Love!

So presently I suggested quietly that the principle of arrested culmination that he was illustrating by the withdrawal of the pan might be applied to the support of a passion that it was sought to keep alive. By baulking it of its "earthly close," hindering it of absolute fulfilment, one might, so to speak, enable it to flourish indefinitely. In that case, I suggested, Love might be persuaded not to "leave the well built nest," but go on adding sticks and mud *ad infinitum*.

"Yes," said Audely, again baulking the custard of its supreme moment; "if there *is* such a thing, which I very much doubt." He put the saucepan over the flame again. "And there's only one person in this house who has a right to talk of passion, and she isn't in it!"

"You don't mean Ilsa?" I cried.

He nodded.

"She's the only one of you who comes within a hundred miles of being capable of it."

I said—rather naughtily, I confess—"How about Mother?"

"Your dear mother," Audely said sturdily, "is capable of any noble emotion."

"Passion included!" said I. The custard had bubbles on it! "Passion, since she has had three children."

Audely removed his pan in good time with one hand, and patted my shoulder kindly with the other, saying, "Let us call it Love, if you don't mind. More decent. Look here, do you really want to know what I think about the matter?"

He didn't wait for me to say yes, but began quite the longest speech I have heard from Audely. I have remembered it, for it interested me.

"Because," he said, "I don't myself believe in any such primitive element. There is a certain aggregate of moods, emotions, and vital interests that people have agreed to call

Passion with a capital P. . . . But I consider that the strange vague leanings and yearnings of one set of cells for another set of cells, bound up in a different epidermis, can't properly be spoken of as a whole. The emotional commodity at any one person's disposal is scattered, fluid, broken up into such infinitely various expressions of the individual ego! . . . You women will grasp at Love as a whole: you go Nap on it, setting about to light a permanently enviroing, lapping, licking flame, that if you go on long enough reaches out to its objective and burns it up!"

"The opposite of the Phoenix, then," I said, but Audely didn't like being interrupted. I am sure that his next speech was an attempt to punish me by reducing all poetry, all love, to the very dreariest materialism. His voice that pleased me so at first, got on my nerves. . . .

"You have been in a sculptor's studio?" he asked. "Have you observed that when they begin a statue they bend a piece of wire into, roughly, the form of a backbone, and then proceed to dab clay on in lumps, until it is covered, like the vertebral column, with muscles? Well, in my opinion the reproductive instinct is the real backbone of passion, that great unnecessary fetish of women!" . . .

I was silent. I hated the phrase "reproductive instinct," as old Audely knew very well, for he said, shrugging his shoulders:

"You would have it, my dear! You should not make me talk seriously. Yes, there's not a doubt of it in my mind. Emotion is only the jam that makes the pill of one at least of Nature's most dreary processes go down."

"Sometimes," I said, "don't you get the jam without the process?" and he answered, without interest: "Oh yes, Nature isn't particular. There's a lot of mere camouflage—window-dressing about. . . ."

He took off the custard, which had thickened all right without curdling, and busied himself with making the salad, talking all the while:

"I fell in love—what *you* would call falling in love—with a woman I had lived beside for a whole year, because I saw her once standing at a railway station rather forlorn, with her feet planted together, like a donkey's, set a little back under an ill-cut short skirt. She looked helpless and brave at the same time, if you understand. She was somebody's hard-worked secretary. But I didn't take her, though I



wrote her love letters of sorts. . . . That little affair, if I had gone on, so as to make her and myself miserable, would have been Love, as *you* understand it: just a drifting of emotional excess in one particular direction . . . an eddy . . . a pool. . . .”

I believe he had forgotten me. He went on talking, and I let him. I had a feeling—nay, I knew—that he would never talk to me in this particular way again.

“I’m not saying that in some instances an affair may not represent the vortex, the swirl in a coffee cup, which once set going, as some scientists say, may become perpetual motion. And human cunning could give it practical duration. . . .”

He asked me if I remembered an Eastern trick he had showed me when I was a child—the coin spinning in the bowl. He said he had forgotten how to do it now. I did remember the awe I had experienced in seeing him spin a penny in one of the bedroom basins at Beardmore after he had come back from the East. He had said it was merely a matter of balance, and that if the right angle was found and retained, the penny might go on careering round the edge of the bowl for ever. He reminded me that I had exclaimed:

“Perhaps God the Father started us like that!”

Then he took off his nightgown-apron and went to the sink and washed his hands like a lamb at Mrs. Huggins’ invitation. While he was doing it, he murmured apologetically to me:

“Still, I have an idea that the kingdoms of the Earth and all the fruits thereof will be to the man or woman who is able to throw aside the present standard of hopeless impracticability—that notion of raw, preposterous, elemental Love, that rides most of us. I have. Well, run upstairs now”—(As if I ever run!)—“and lay the cloth. I hear your Mother shouting for her custard.”

We were both on the kitchen stairs by the time when I found something to say, and said it pertly, for Audely had managed to make me feel somehow that I should prefer even the cold white morals of the Moon to the desiccated reasonable emotions of the society he so amiably fore shadowed for us all.

I turned my long neck back to him on the stairs.

“Just a business detail, Audely!” I said. “Don’t you suppose that some day we women will be able to evolve a substitute for the raw stuff of passion we want, but can’t get

in your dreadful world? Some neat, colourable imitation that will do as well, but that you won't like! And we will call it Synthetic Love, shall we?"

"That's it!" Audely said, giving me a kind push as we got on to the top step, and back into the full electric light. "Don't let us leave all the useful discoveries to the Germans!"

Mrs. Huggins had hobbled upstairs while we were arguing about Love and laid the cloth in the morning-room, where Mother was waiting. The dining-room is all draped in cloths, even the gilt candelabra, and looks very impressive, like an engraving by Piranesi. Mother was amused at her protégée's wit. For Mrs. Huggins set the chicken on the table, saying, with intention, she hadn't troubled to bring the cruet, for she expected it was 'ot enough already, by the smell, for she had sneezed three times coming upstairs with it.

It was quite an adventure! Audely admitted, as soon as we could speak and had cooled our mouths with water:

"I put too much, perhaps. Venice was confusing me. Your daughter and I, Beaty, have been having a No-Heart to No-Heart talk."

"Audely," I said, "is a Jesuit, inventing scientific excuses to justify man's practice of taking short views, while woman is more or less forced to take long ones."

"I don't know what you mean," Mother said, naturally enough. "But I wonder why neither of you takes custard? It is very refreshing after the delicious chicken."

I tried to explain what I had meant, for Audely's benefit.

"That's the real point at issue between the sexes. The difference between short views and long ones. *She* must cling—*he* need not stay. Isn't that it, Audely?"

He could not answer. Mother enjoyed her custard, and every one was content except Mrs. Huggins, who preferred dry bread to making her supper off the remains of the Hell Chicken.

To explain to you a little what follows, I must tell you that Audely and I, with a farthing dip, made an excursion to the cellar, to fetch up a couple of bottles of white wine that came a year ago in a cask from Assmanshausen, and that the man says isn't paid for. We bottled it ourselves—at least Audely did, to please Mother, who stood over him,

holding a wooden mallet to knock the corks in with. I never take wine, but to-night Audely made me, to celebrate the Declaration of War with Germany that was due within a few hours, unless they got out of Belgium.

We had heard that it was to be announced from the various Town Halls. I meant to go out to hear it at one of them, but I was so sleepy with the wine and hanging over the hot stove that I had to say Good-night to Mother and Audely and go to bed. They had made me up a shakedown for the night in Mother's room, which I hated. I was very cross with Audely for insisting on stopping all night at Park Crescent and taking the room that I was going to have, Papa's dressing-room, just across the corridor from Mother's, which is in the front of the house overlooking the Park.

I was awakened from my first sleep by shouting. I opened my eyes and saw Mother undressing on tip-toe not to wake me. I am glad I woke in time to catch it—it was a sound like wild beasts roaring. The British lion, thirsting for his meat! . . . It signified the People's satisfaction at the news of the declaration of hostilities which had just been made them in the good old mediæval fashion, from the steps of the Town Hall.

Audely, who had run out and seen the crowd, said they seemed delighted at the idea of what they think is going to be a "tidy scrap," but are confident won't last more than a year at the most, possibly not more than a few months. Audely himself, Mother says, doesn't think it will go on over six. But he was very much down on the mob cheering, as it were, the announcement of a lively programme made by a man in evening dress, standing in front of the curtain at a transpontine theatre. Later, he predicts, we shall demonstrate our national inclination to bad form, as we did in the Boer War, by startling headlines. It will be "Big New Battle near the"—near whatever river or sea or plain they are fighting on. "Tragedy off the Thames!" "Thrilling naval scrap at Rosyth!" and so on. . . .

The noise died down, the Jingoës had all gone home to bed, pleased with themselves and their Government. Mother went on confiding to me her cheerful supposition that it would only be a short brush and then over, a sort of letting blood for the good of the country's stamina. She thinks it will do Belle-Belle and his like a lot of good to be made to

hustle, and test their physical powers, so impaired by a life of ease, and generally look to the joints of their armour. And then, thinks she, when they have all got themselves up to the last pitch of efficiency, everything will be arranged, the parties squared, and the order given to send them all home again. She thinks she knows all about it, because she is an ex-Ambassadress, and wars, to her thinking, are made and fought out in Chancelleries.

She continued giving me her views, *i.e.* Audely's, watered down with her own fears and domesticities, even after she had got into bed and turned out the light. I rather wanted to know what Audely thought of the situation, and I listened, lying in Anatole's little lowly cot beside her. What was more or less disturbing her was the dread of invasion. The whole of the *littoral*, she says—meaning the whole of the East Coast—lies practically open to attack. If the Germans were to boldly adventure their fleet of flat-bottomed boats—see *The Riddle of the Sands*, by a friend of Papa's—there would be a very fair chance of a successful landing and an absolutely straight drive on London. . . .

We are a long way from the East End, which would of course suffer the first brunt of the attack, but it was this sort of talk, as Mother slowly drifted off to sleep with the words still on her mouth, that seemed to me so sinister. I began to picture the advance corps of a battalion of German soldiers riding victoriously up the street, being sniped at from the roofs of all the clubs in Pall Mall—except perhaps the Athenæum!—and magnanimously taking no notice. There is really something fascinating in the idea of the Mailed Fist in the Velvet Glove, casqued, cuirassed, encased in golden armour shining in the autumn sun, riding up one of our calm grave main streets. It would be like that, I imagine, if ever they did get here—a Progress, for all the vulgar tussling would have been got over in the Eastern approach to London. They would be victors by the time they got to the Strand and Pall Mall. . . .

Mother stopped talking and dropped off, but I got more and more interested in the works of my own imagination, and took to picturing the Kaiser—whom I have never seen, though he has dined in this house, and his portrait framed in silver hangs on the way upstairs, and probably inspired my thoughts—riding at the head of his army, accompanied by his favourite Count Le Löffel, the man I used to take pleasure

in insulting at Nauheim. This time it would not be a question of my little ladylike pin-pricks—I should have no more heart to insult him. I should just have to bow my head proudly, and acknowledge defeat. . . .

Or the Count might happen to be billeted on us. Should I have to get up and poignard him in the night? No; I should dissemble and use all my charms and prestige to gain concessions for my country. I should appeal to his sentimental recollections, the flower he sent me, that I have still—if Mother hasn't sneaked it. For you know she makes domiciliary visits.

She has put away the photograph signed "Willy Hohenzollern." He gave it us the year after he had our yacht. I rather wonder at her hiding the portrait, for from an ignoble save-your-skin point of view it might be as well to leave it out. To do Mother justice, she would never think of that, but sink or swim with the rest of Park Crescent, if the Huns ever occupy London and put us to fire and sword.

And while I was exonerating her from any base motives of *sauve qui peut*, she was talking away in her sleep, exhibiting a shocking practical want of civism, *i.e.* the intention of collaring supplies. She was murmuring:

"I don't suppose a side of bacon will be too much to get!"

I know what she is going to do. She did it, I am told, during the Boer War, and during the Fashoda time when there was a danger of war with France, and filled the whole upper storey with tinned meats which the family had to eat up and was grumbling over, long after peace was declared. And the moment this "tiresome, unfair" moratorium is over, she is going to realize her stocks and shares, hoard sovereigns, and store sacks of gold in the basement. Mother doesn't trust banks. And Ilsa is to bring back wine and linen and oil and silk stockings from abroad, if she is mad enough to go. . . . All my people are mad in their separate ways. Ilsa comes South to-morrow, or next day, *en route* for the Continent, which indeed it is her custom to visit for a month in the autumn regularly. She swears she will go naked rather than be clothed anywhere else than in Paris. The Galerie Lafayette calls—"one last clear call" for Ilsa—and she will obey her pilot. . . .

Lying there, in the dark stillness—Mother was snoring very gently—I had a sort of wave of clarity: a blinding intuition about Ilsa flashed on my mind. I wish to put it

on record, and it is fairly safe and no betrayal of Ilsa to tell it to you, who cannot put your oar in under a fortnight or a month. I *don't* believe that my sister is going to run herself into discomfort, and perhaps danger, for the sake of clothes. It isn't the Galerie Lafayette that calls: it is a man!

There is a man in Paris attached to Quenford's staff, who was with us at Lochroyan this year. He and Ilsa never spoke to each other; but then, he was never known to speak to any one, except presumably his valet. I dare say I never mentioned him to you; he was so utterly negligible. But quite a good sort—Archie Dunkeron, the Master of Cramont. . . . Now I come to think of it, he was always in the room where Ilsa was, and his heavy handsome face always turned her way. And Ilsa never presumed on it, never took liberties with him, or asked him to fetch and carry for her; never chaffed him or teased him in any way. (That she couldn't have done, for he is a very Scotch Scotchman!) But she made a difference, and when a lazy, arrogant person like Ilsa makes even a difference, it may mean a great deal. I know Archie Dunkeron is in Paris; he is indispensable to Cousin Alfred. I don't exactly know in what capacity; nobody does; but it is obvious that in delicate missions and secret deals the Master's impenetrable cast of countenance and badly hung tongue would be most useful. . . .

I switched off that set of ideas and tried to go to sleep, but I could not. The thought of my dear Ilsa and the dangers she was about to run for the sake of her love obsessed me, and what Mother had been telling me about the vulnerability of the East Coast bothered me too, although I was not actually afraid. . . . It was just excitement. Ilsa was going out to seek Romance, and Romance was perhaps coming to me . . . here . . . in my Bower, where I had just made up my mind to live on in a shameful smug safety. . . .

I got up and sat at the window, which I ventured to open wide now that Mother had gone to sleep.

Regent's Park is rather a vulgar sort of place by daylight; not so romantic as Kensington Gardens near where we once lived, up in what they call the Dukeries. Holland Park was full of owls and they shouted all night. White ones. I dare say there are owls in the Regent's Park too; at any rate, by night it is mysterious and beautiful enough. Those great blue-black blots of sodden dust-drenched foliage, that merge into the paler gloom of night at the edges! I imagine dirt

makes them solid; every leaf, by this time of year, coated with grime. . . .

Our house is high, and I can see right over the tree tops as far as Edgware Road and the chimneys of the Power Station there, like a tall spire jutting out of the leaves. . . .

A strange thought came to me. Leaves, boughs, a sort of panoply masking an advancing army! Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane! . . . You see how my sleepy mind worked! . . .

I assure you that presently those dusky clumps to me were thick of men, that bore up the screen of foliage. . . . And they moved! . . . I was convinced I saw them move. . . . It was only a fascinating play of thought, at first, that I encouraged as hard as I could, for the fun of it—a sort of voluptuous nightmare. . . . Then somehow I was caught in my own springe: it became a menace, so impressively real that I stiffened as I sat there at the window. I knew that even if staying meant death, I could not have withdrawn. I must see it out. . . .

The hard stone sill cut me through my nightgown, that there was, as usual, a button off. Berrymore is so careless. I don't scold her enough. As a matter of fact I don't care for smart "night rail." Ilsa and her cult of fascinating "undies" had made me detest the sight of baby ribbon and lace. As a protest, I have designed myself an ascetic sort of nightgown of blue linen with no lace at all, only a wide ribbon drawn through two large eyelet holes at the neck to keep it together. . . .

I am telling you this to show that the pain and Berrymore's lapse had taken my mind off Macbeth, and the wild notion of a possible army of Germans concealed under the boskage and marching on Park Crescent. . . . But suddenly—and now of course you will think I am only making copy, and it may have been insects dying in their autumn milliads, for though we had had a hot day it is cold of nights, and the flies and daddy-long-legs lie about numb, and make some sort of noise dying, perhaps. . . . Or it was birds shifting on the boughs of trees where they had gone to roost (I have seen frightened pheasants crash right down off the branches in Tinsack woods), or mice and rats and other rodents creeping about in the undergrowth beneath the boughs—well, whatever it may have been, a distinct hum arose. It grew and thickened into a low, dull, but quite perceptible roar, pierced

by short sharp clear sounds like the noise pieces of china make when they knock against each other in a cabinet. . . .

I believe it was the coupling and uncoupling of trains on the District Railway which we sometimes hear very plainly when the wind is in that direction. I forgot that now, and any way, there didn't seem to be any wind at all. . . . And in the growing swell there came another noise that I knew quite well, connected with a certain urgency in my mind: the sirens and hooters one hears and has to make good with in London on New Year's Eve, instead of church bells, to announce the stroke of midnight. It is all poor old London can do to usher in the year of toil—using the same signal that summons the workers from their few hours' sleep. Why should it be used now—at half-past one in the morning? . . .

Again and again it sounded; closer and closer came the warnings, now muffled, now sharp, now yearning, now imperative. . . .

All around me there began to be a dense wakefulness, a sense of gloomy preparedness, that made me think of soldiers that have been bivouacking, summoned by the call to arms, stretching and yawning. . . . blear-eyed, but alert. . . .

Do you know, my ears ached, as they used to do at the telephone in the beginning, when one was too eager and listened with too much attention. I was doing that now. It was just like the poem of Childe Roland:

*"And noise increasing like a bell. . . ."*

For me all doubt was now at an end. Those sirens and hooters were warnings. . . . The Germans were in London!

I was as sure of it as if I had been personally warned.

I took my breast, with the thin red line all across it off the bar, and left the window, holding my nightgown together at the neck, for it had suddenly grown very cold. I felt what hunted animals feel: the need to choose whether I would rush out into the open and take the chance of being killed, or shelter in the depths of my cage which in the end would be surrounded. . . .

I looked out again—and was more sure. . . .

Yes, the German hordes were even now hacking their way through the devoted East End. A wave of obstinacy passed over me that I wouldn't even wake Mother, sleeping away so peacefully, to the knowledge of the horror a moment sooner than she needed to be wakened, that I alone would



watch and let come what would. Yes, I determined to be killed at my post at the window looking out over the Regent's Park!

It was exactly like that the first time I was at Tinsack after I was grown up—when my wretched Aunt Minna left me alone in the Walled-up Drawing Room, just when the December light was fading. That room in the lonely house in the wolds of Yorkshire is haunted, you know, and it is called the Walled-up Room because of it. Nobody could sit in it, once; and a hundred years ago they got the priest, with bell, book, and candle, to lay the ghost in three of the corners, which were forthwith bricked up with masonry. And there the blunt corners are! Aunt Minna had said, coldly:

“I'll be back in ten minutes. Will you come with me to see the puppy—or will you stay here?”

She added maliciously:

“I warn you you'll hear noises. As soon as the sun goes down they begin in this room . . . the ghosts . . . stirring in the corners. Jolly, isn't it? It's what made me marry your uncle, to have this house!”

I said I would stop till she came back. I wasn't going to be browbeaten by an American aunt. I sat down in the middle of the room on a stool, embroidered, so the legend says, in crewels, by Uncle Henry's great-great-great-grandmother, now a ghost in one of the corners, and repeated all the battle cries I knew to give me courage. “Stand fast, Craig Ellachie!” and “Stick it, the Welsh!” . . .

It was no use. The cracking began in one corner and then broke out in the other, until all three were going at once. My skin began to prickle. I sat on the middle of my stool as if it was an island in a sea of terrors. Then I bolted. And Aunt Minna was “real” mean about it.

I stood at the window now in Park Crescent, and the dark room behind me was like a tomb. I left off holding back the heavy curtains Mother insists on having in any room she sleeps in. She says it is what keeps her young and vigorous, and it is also the reason why I detest sleeping in the same room with her. I let them go. They came to with a rush. I ran helter-skelter past Mother. She seemed to me for the moment like an old person whom I would have to run back for when the time came, and drag her to a place of safety. And where I ran to in my bewilderment was Audely's room

on the other side of the passage. He was the only man in the house, and would have to be wakened ! . . .

Audely's room was lighted up by the great electric standard in Albany Street. One could almost see to read by it. Audely was stretched across, not along the bed in the ordinary manner. He was sound asleep, with all his clothes on except his coat. His shirt sleeve was rolled back right up his forearm, which was very white. I noticed that. He had evidently flung himself down on the bed as he was undressing, and had been overcome with drowsiness. He is used to sleeping casually, taking his rest where and while he can get it. Half the time, he told me, when he is travelling, he hasn't a bed at all, or hesitates to get into the one provided for him in doubtful hotels and caravanserais.

I was possessed by the determination to awaken him, for all our sakes—not mine especially. I pinched and cuffed him. I took hold of him by the shoulder, getting my arm round the curve as if it was a baby's. It wasn't the least good. He would not wake, although I shouted in his ear a hundred times :

“Audely, wake up! Audely, you must! Audely, the Germans are here !”

When I found I couldn't make the slightest impression on him, my zeal to do so, I can't understand why, died down.

I suppose because I got physically tired. One isn't used to trying to pull six-foot-two out of bed. Mother used to for fun, when he wouldn't get up for breakfast, pulling all the clothes off him, but now he wasn't in the clothes to pull. And at Beardmore she used to stick acid drops between his sheets, and those of the other men visitors, too, so that they couldn't manage to get into bed, even ! What a long time it seems since the days of apple-pie beds ! . . .

And I wasn't any more really frightened. I was coming slowly out of the nightmare and seeing things the way one does in the waking from a dream . . . bewildered. . . It was Mother's war talk at dinner, worse than goose or lobster. I knew in my heart of hearts that it was all mere hypothesis about an invasion, but I still wanted Audely to wake, for a few sensible words from him would clear my brain and send me back to finish the night quietly in my own bed.

It maddened me to think that I could not get these few words from this immovable Audely, sleeping away so arrogantly against my will ! . . .

The blind was drawn up and the windows open too, as I should have had if I had been in this room. Then, I dare say, I should have had a healthy sleep and not gone sleep-walking. . . . But as it was I felt as if I couldn't simply go back to that dull dark cavern again where Mother lay sleeping in her adored stuffiness. It was so lovely and calm in Audely's room.

The standard lamp outside lit it faintly, a still yellow glare, less elfish and casual than moonlight. Peace descended on me like balm. I have always had a notion that the mere neighbourhood of a healthy creature asleep, even a dog, is invigorating and bracing, in a queer physiological way. I didn't want to leave Audely, my present mascot. . . .

I wandered all over the room, touching things, disturbing them and altering their places, for no reason whatever, like a magpie. I passed my hands over the papers spread all over his dressing-table that he seemed to have no other use for. Audely is always perfectly clean and well groomed, but there is nothing dandified about him and his ways; and though he has a valet he could do perfectly well without him. . . . That dressing-table, treated like a writing-desk, for instance! . . . It was simply covered with papers—things, I suppose, he had turned out of his pocket pell-mell before lying down, looking as if they had been carried about for days. . . .

I was horrid. I leisurely looked at Audely's papers, and my eye seemed to single out the one that mattered to me.

It was a typewritten sheet of paper, addressed to Sir Audely Bar, Bart.

*"You are requested to report to the Commanding Officer Fifth Battalion, Northamshire Regiment, on the 18th, 8.15, at Fordingbridge."*

I turned round and saw Audely was awake, and one could not tell for how long he had been awake. His eyes were wide open, and he was staring at me in a way that made me feel how mean I was. His gaze was so humiliating, that to justify myself for coming into his room and reading his private papers I seized upon the old excuse of terror at the German Invasion, which seemed so infinitely unimportant, now. . . .

"Oh, Audely, I was so frightened . . . and I simply could not get you to wake!"

Audely then was most awfully good to me. I quite loved him for it. He would have had every right to turn me out of his room as a low sort of spy, but he didn't scorn and abuse me, but just pulled himself up and sat on the edge of the bed, and held out his arms to me as if I were a little girl afraid of the dark who wanted comforting. I had just hit upon his rôle in life. . . .

He asked me no questions, only repeated, as you do to a child, "Was it frightened, was it frightened, then, a poor little thing?"

To a great tall weedy grown-up woman like me it was slightly ridiculous, but the best thing he could do. He wouldn't admit to being upset by a girl walking into his bedroom in the middle of the night and calmly reading his private papers. There's one nice trait about Audely, and I suppose he gets it from his wandering life: he is never surprised at any human development, or if he is he never shows it. I don't believe he has ever seen me, or even Mother, cry. We Arles don't cry.

Presently, when I felt better, I got shy and left him, and went to the window and looked out. He watched me. . . .

All was now intensely still. There was not a murmur. Of course a room at the back of the house doesn't hear the same noises as a room on the other side, and I explained to him the row there had been in the front where I had been sleeping. I said that some local chatter or other had got on my nerves, and that I had magnified it into an enemy landing.

"One is bound to get these panics in war time, old girl!" he said. "Now you run back to bed like a good child, and don't worry about the Germans any more. They'll not get here—or if they try, the best of us will get ourselves killed in stopping them. And it will be worked *over there*, not in England to worry you." He nodded his head in the direction of, I suppose, France.

"You mean, that you personally are going to stop them?"

I did not like to allude more clearly to the colonel's order.

"Going to have a try at it!" Audely mumbled, pulling off his tie and collar with it. "What the thundering else?"

I told him then how dreadfully upset Mother would be, and that he really should not have sprung a commission on her without consulting her, as I knew he must have.

He answered mildly:

"I couldn't have stayed at home, and let little frightened guinea-pigs with half a skin like Belle-Belle go out and expose their carefully manicured persons. It wouldn't have been possible. No, let them take my old carcase instead. I give it 'em freely."

"But still," I went on, making Mother the cover for my own objections, "Mother has a right——"

"Now look here!" Audely said; "I love and respect your Mother more than any one else in the world. But I could not allow her to dictate to me upon a point of honour. Why, even Belle-Belle Smith didn't ask Susan Dowlais for her permission! . . ."

"No, my dear"—he brushed aside Mother, and spoke as if I were interceding with him not to go, for myself—"you women must be content to be shunted in these days. What does old Kipling say? *White arms cling to the bridle rein—Red lips tarnish the scabbarded steel.* . . . The only way a woman needs to mess with a man's trappings nowadays is to get some Gesso and shine his buttons for him!"

"Mother will do that for you all right," I said.

I wanted to go, but somehow I didn't know in the least how to get out of the room. He tried to help me by ordering me out, saying it wasn't decent, and that I'd get cold.

And then out of contrariness I wanted to stay. It wasn't a bit cold, I said, and I sat down in the arm-chair and asked him if he had got a cigarette about anywhere, though I don't usually smoke. He said he hadn't. A lie! We were fighting, really. He walked about the room as if he were composing. I said I knew what he was thinking about, and that I didn't envy him his job—of telling Mother. I was sure he hadn't told her, I said, for she wouldn't in that case be sleeping away quietly in the next room. Nor would she have arranged to go back to Lochroyan, if she had known. Nothing, not even Papa, would have moved her; she would stay to see him off. . . .

"No, I haven't told her, you little fiend," he said, "and there's going to be a fearful row."

He intimated that he could stand it all right if I would go away and let him get a few hours' sleep. Poor Audely! He's such a very sleepy person, but he can't always have everything the way he likes it. He wants standing up to now and then. He doesn't treat women with enough respect and consideration. The more he seemed to want to be rid

of me, the more I made up my mind to stay, till at last he did get me out—with rudeness and Kipling combined!

The wretch got into bed just as he was, mumbling, for me to take notice of:

“Take away your white arms and red lips, and let a poor weary soldier wrap himself in his blanket and turn in before it is quite daylight, can’t you?” . . . A pause. “Look here, you cruel cat, clear out—and do you mind drawing the curtains before you go, to keep out the dawn?”

I went to the window, did what he asked, and came back to him. He put out his hand and pinched a corner of my nightgown as I passed:

“I can’t say I think much of your *dishabille*, my dear. . . .”

His voice sounded half asleep; he was pretending to be irresponsible, so as to get off a good insult;—

“I guess Belle-Belle could give you points.”

I told him he was an insolent beast, and if he said any more I would draw the curtains and let in the light fully. For it was coming in like anything, and the birds were just beginning to shout. I looked at him—he was really asleep.

It was no use my going to bed again, for sleep had been chased away. I sat up and wrote some poetry. . . . Audely hadn’t asked me to give him any promise about not telling Mother, and I decided to leave them both alone and let them fight it out themselves.

This was over a week ago. I lost this letter, but will post it all to-day. Up to the time of writing—six o’clock—no one has said anything about Audely and his commission, and I don’t think Mother *could* keep a thing like that to herself. She is going to Lochroyan to-morrow by the ten o’clock, King’s Cross. There is this evening. Audely is coming to dinner. I am going out to dine with the Leahys, and on to a meeting of a Committee of some Welfare Project they are trying to interest me in. There are so many. But one’s name does seem to be some good. After Mother goes I am, I hear, to be planted out with various friends of Mother’s—Susan Dowlais and Lily St. Just among others. I have bargained for a time at the Gerald Quains’ country cottage—just a sop in the wilderness of Family or Society women Mother likes for me.

## XI

### *From The Lady Arles*

#### PARK CRESCENT.

WELL, my dear, here we are again, back in town in the very height of, as you might say, the Dead Season. It is a thing that has never happened to me before: an entirely new sensation, and, at my age, not at all a pleasant one. One gets so into a rut. It is the sense of inappropriateness, of matter in the wrong place, as philosophers say, that, as it were, gets one, and makes one wake up in the night and pinch oneself to know if one is really here, with the stuffy feeling there always is in town in the recess. A regular fish out of water, I feel, or a Highland stag wandering in the Regent's Park. Yet if it was any other month except August it would be all right, and it is very nearly all fancy except the used-up air, which is a fact. London is rather like a room that has just been emptied of too many people in it. Still, Society has imposed many a fetish on us, I begin to see, and told all sorts of traveller's tales to back up its contention. I was always told that in August and September the grass began to grow between the paving stones of Lincoln's Inn. It doesn't, actually, I can see for myself, for I often go there to my solicitors. But there isn't much scavengering done there or anywhere in poor old London nowadays, while in the West End everything has a trick of looking wilted—in the drapers' windows the dragging old-fashioned blouses, and in the poulterers' shops, where the very droop of a thin trussed chicken suggests *fin de saison*.

All this frightful destruction of the old landmarks of Society does help one to realize the war. And though I have no doubt there are other people in town, they are all sheltering behind the blinds, like old Lady Kew in Thackeray. It isn't really the thing to let people know one is up, so I am a

good deal alone. I only use the little morning-room ; it is not worth while to undo the drawing-room for these few days, and it looks so melancholy all done up in dust-sheets that I dare not go in. I feel like a caretaker in my own house. Venice is more or less out all day, and poor old Mrs. Huggins, out of modesty, makes herself so scarce that one neither hears nor sees her. She appears at breakfast, bringing in the kippers or scrambled eggs that she has prepared quite nicely, bumping against the furniture in her nervousness and trying hard to be as quiet as the ghost she looks, poor old soul. All skin and bone, but a very good servant all the same. I can really, I find, do with much less than I have been accustomed to.

If she only guessed the fellow feeling I, Beaty Arles, am growing to have for her and her like, condemned to this sort of thing for life, and tranquilly accepting it as her heaven-given lot. While I am grouching at the taste I am getting of the same thing, but which is only temporary, in my case ! Just for the moment one is sharing the life of thousands like her, chars and housekeepers and plumbers and painters and even poor clerks, a cut above, but whose work keeps them here with their wives and children, or waiting perhaps till their head or boss has had his holiday and their turn comes. They, like me, watch the leaves turn brown and fall and swirl about the street through the dreary weeks, telling them in every leaf that the summer is a-getting on, and will be practically over before they are free to take their wretched week or fortnight at the suburban sea, as I call that Essex side of England where Southend and Clacton are. They can't get themselves and their large families to the real seas or moors ; fares with them are a consideration. I remember it cost nearly a hundred pounds to move us—cars, linen, and plate, and ten servants—from London to Lochroyan !

Lochroyan ! Oh, to be there now ! Now—and then ! I can tell you, my dear, it was a slightly different thing to watch the autumn tints maturing from Marchmont Hill or the Portmore Woods where that bored French wife of the dull Scotch laird lived. I gave her a hectic week in town once, and she made the most of it. Those woods ! Such a glory of clean gold and red ! Here the autumn tints more match the colour of Mrs. Huggins' gown—no colour at all but mud colour, that is.

Past the windows they go now—the leaves fell very early



this hot summer ; it is as if the wind was sweeping up countless thousands of Mrs. Hugginses, sending them flying, willy-nilly, half over London, to end sticking in the spouts and gutters. . . .

The poor People, so called, that one hacks out and uses to bits one way and another in our service ! One is so glad to get them in, commandeer them from their hovels, to mind one's palace for one while one is away, gallivanting on the best the world offers. And we don't even let them live in our bigger airier rooms ; we consign them to the basement, however dark, and are off, cheerfully careering over the moors in a fresh wind or lounging on a golden sandy beach that stretches far away beyond the eye to a blue, blue sea like Bamborough, that year we took the Castle. Home-beaches aren't golden, you have to go to Northumberland for that ; and the sea itself, in Home Waters, is more like an ostler's pailful of muddy water in the corner of a stable yard.

I often see Mrs. Huggins' grandchild, with its poor little nose pressed against the window in the basement, watching the leaves dance. The sight keeps it quiet, while her grandmother is busy working for us. It pains me to see child misery, but what exactly can I do ? I am terrified that Venice will notice the baby and want me to have it upstairs and she will look after it ! The remedy would be worse than the disease. . . . Poor Venice !

This time in London will end by making me a Socialist in a way. Venice thinks she is one already.

We never dine at home. Audely takes us out for dinner at a fresh place every evening. The food is rather chancy, which neither he nor I mind, but I am afraid Venice does.

The night we sampled the Servian restaurant in Canton Street the poor child, in spite of charming revolutionary figures gathered in all the corners there and obviously conspiring up to the hilt, could not bring herself to partake of sticky soup, on which the unclarified fat stood up in lumps, served in enamel cups, and black veal disposed on a greasy bed of rice that the whole personnel might have gone to bed on the night before. I fancy Audely rather enjoyed her distress ; he is always down upon her for being greedy ! However, she played up and was polite and grateful to him as host. And Audely wasn't so bad, for on the way home he presented her with a guinea box of chocolates, which she consumed half of before she went to bed that night.

I must say that Audely is kinder than ever, strangely tender and considerate: a new sort of Audely, more like a son to me and a brother to Venice and Ilsa than the rather carping and censorious friend he used to be. I suppose it is the war. He and my Venice get on splendidly, better than they ever did before, and it gives me great pleasure.

Of course I have come to the conclusion that even they could not be quite so *laissez-aller* if Audely had not utterly put out of his mind that silly letter he wrote to her once, and that I discovered under her blotting pad. It was just a mood, and he has thought better of it, as he has of many another. I do believe that I am the only woman Audely has really ever stuck to. I don't count foreign women—they are out to appeal to the lower natures of men, and Audely is human.

I have set down his queer sudden hanker after Venice as a symptom of his love of experimentalizing on human beings. In this game he has to give something of himself or he wouldn't get anything in the way of a response from them. You really can't get to know some women properly unless you have an affair with them, he often says in his high-flown way. . . .

Men like my dear Audely, poets and philosophizers to death as they are, are really out of it in these days of strenuousness in everything—Love and War, too. The War has made such short work of all unreal feelings, masquerading as real, as they can manage to do when one isn't "right up against it." Nowadays, when there is so much dying about, people either dismiss Love entirely, or they go for a person of the opposite sex tooth and nail, in the face of the possibilities of mutilation and perhaps death, dropping all the fair weather ties, that don't seem capable of giving them the support they want. Audely and Venice wouldn't help each other at all; he can't support, and she can't cling. They both love their mental ease too much to put all their eggs in one basket, which is what a great passion means, I think. Venice, without giving much, would insist on taking all, and would never put up with less than the whole of a man. Now, though Audely is so quiet and secretive that scandals about him are like summer clouds; the liaison with the Spanish lady seems about as notorious as anything about Audely could ever be! . . .

I often wonder how the poor Donna, or Senhora, who-

ever she is, gets on without him these days? She must be wretched, and so alone. The letter seems to imply that she depended on him for everything. That would bore him, if it were all. She must be exceedingly fascinating in her weakness to be able to bore him and hold him too. For though Audely can do without her, or any woman, one knows weakness, *properly done*, is the best way to hold him or any man. Though he doesn't depend on any one else for his happiness, he likes to *faire la pluie et le beau temps* for others. If I didn't continually call upon Audely for this or that, he would have shed me long ago. He admits it. He said to me once: "You know, my dear, I am not really the sort of animal that loves women. I am only sorry for them." And another time:

"I believe I am incapable of caring for a person with any constancy."

That is to say, he doesn't really care at all: he only feels, as sometimes Venice says, a passionate interest in this one or that.

Of course if he can't get her, or if she is suddenly reft away from him by her principles or a more urgent suitor, he'll have a longish fit of hysterics or get jaundice or something. For with him it *is* only disappointment, not real, passionate, importunate grief: that which in a woman lines her face and turns her hair grey at the temples. . . .

He used to sit there and tell us that the mention of love between lovers was actually indecent. That's silly. But he does so love things taken for granted, does Audely!

He likes sudden effects, anything *imprévu*, just as Venice and I like a new play or camping out or picnicking. We both enjoyed ourselves immensely the first night we arrived here to an empty, shut-up house, with no one to do anything for us but literally this old Mrs. Huggins, whom they were all at me to sack, but whom I kept on—out of sheer pity, I think—as caretaker, because she was perfectly trustworthy, although nothing but skin and bone. I must say she came up to the scratch wonderfully, and there were all sorts of unexpected things to do. Audely insisted on stopping here—some tale of his servant's levanting suddenly, which I didn't believe a bit. He felt lonely in Arlington Street, that's all. She had to get Arles' room, where Venice intended to sleep, ready for him in a hurry, and put up a bed for Venice in my room. I believe it was Anatole's—the one he used to

sleep across the pantry door on. He was faithful in that particular; we never missed a thing. And certainly the country forfeited a good cook in him, and they are terribly rare nowadays. Audely was sure he could do quite as well, and I said, Prove it! and made him undertake the dinner for us and himself that night. Audely's cooking was masterly, but a little startling. His recipe for chicken was to put two teaspoonfuls of pepper to one fowl. It burnt my mouth out, but Audely and Venice were so happy over it that I said nothing, and just cooled my mouth as well as I could with the nice simple custard Audely made especially for me.

Venice made a great fuss about what she called discovering our own basement. She said it was like being The Princess wandering about with Curdie in the underground camp of the Goblins. Rather discourteous to our poor basement, which is only a half-one after all, and not so dark as some!

Of course next night Audely had got tired of cooking, and we went out and sampled Soho. I don't know where we went that night or the one after, but the next again, Ilsa had come up *en route* for Paris, and Audely took us to a special place he knew that would be immensely becoming to her!

The landlord told us he was a Russian, but looked German. The place was full, though, of Russian emblems, as if to bear out his contention: heads of bears stuck up that he tells us he shot himself in his ancestral home, ikons that he prays to after the place is shut up. Audely looks sarcastic, which Ilsa says means that M—— is not so Russian as all that. The Futurist room that we were brought to see, done by a friend of Rowley Deane's, took my breath away. It is all in blues and yellows and reds; almost indecent, somehow, with men like pit-props walking about—not a little bit *like* men in my idea. But Audely says that in non-representational art you must only indicate—get the vital representative—something most complicated. . . . The other sort of painting has been done—to death. Still, give me a Downman or a Raeburn when it is a question of a portrait of a member of *my* family, at least, and that is what people will always say, when it comes to *paying* for a likeness.

There were several pictures of the same kind about. One represented, in this half-and-half way, "A Night Out." There were some things like bottles in it, and an unmistakable pair of stays, and two men's faces. . . .

Venice came out suddenly with the word "lewd." She said it was the leading expression on the faces as far as she could see. I didn't myself like such a Shakespearean word on the lips of a young girl, but Audely said it was correct, and that that was the intention of the artist. The room appears to be used for private dinner parties and so on. The landlord says he is forced by the authorities to keep it strictly utilitarian and nearly unfurnished, except for table and chairs. He isn't even allowed to have a sofa in it.

If I were a man taking a nice woman out I should not care to bring her to a place like this; it would take most people's appetite away, either for eating or lovemaking, but tastes differ, and it may be stimulating to some.

Ilsa, who *has* dined once in a *cabinet particulier*, just to see what it was like, declares that a room like that would make you moral, because it would kill the lust of the eye. No, Audely said, her blonde beauty, taken in conjunction with the *agaçante* quality of the apartment, would just burn the topless towers of Ilion!

I consider that the conversation in the room that night, and before my unmarried daughter too, rather overstepped the bounds. . . . It is the war, I think, that loosens all our tongues, and sets the young of both sexes talking more wildly than usual. Let us eat and drink and say what we like, for to-morrow we die! I have read that after the French Revolution, too, people wore too little and said too much. Are we coming to a time of licence like that? One hopes not. The dress is most unbecoming to the old—split up the sides, and so vaporous!

But at all events my young people are merry and cheerful, and I console myself for the chance of evil communications by reflecting that it would take a great deal to break down Venice's innate purity. And realizing what's what, and seeing things a little as they are and the school of adversity generally, has its advantages. If she has grown more hardened in some ways, she is certainly more feminine in others—little personal ways that only a woman would understand. . . .

Ilsa called me to her the other day and invited me to look through the open door of Venice's bedroom. Venice was threading one of her own chemises with baby ribbon!

Ilsa will have it that the child is in love! With whom, Good Heavens! Of course town is full of charming young men in khaki, whom it immensely becomes. But one doesn't

jump for her at an engagement to a soldier who may get himself killed before he can come back and ratify it! And yet, the way things are going on, there doesn't seem to be going to be a single fairly eligible parti who isn't in the Army as a matter of course. Everybody who is anybody joins. Needs must, when the Germans drive. Our girls must get engaged and take the risk. That is the new morality. So that is why I have made up my mind not to take Venice back with me to Lochroyan, where I go next week, and have arranged to let her divide her time between Lily St. Just and Susan Dowlais. They both keep open house—nearly as good as a canteen, without the work of carrying heavy trays about, from which Ellen Reveley has collapsed already. It gave her appendicitis. Lily St. Just's new little house in Kensington, "The Schack," is, as Venice says, a regular Y.M.C.A. of the Upper Classes, and she has made no objection to going there, and has consented to drop the Endell Street Nursing Scheme, which she was fearfully keen on, just because, I believe, the uniform was so picturesque. . . . The girl isn't really strong enough to do war work, and I hope that Lily's and Susan's entourage will distract her from it.

Aunt Minna is down on my letting her go to Lily's, because of Lily's errors in the past, which people haven't forgotten. Certainly Lily has come through something, but it has left her with forty thousand a year, and she looks Spanish; and as I said to Minna, surely there ought to be some sort of statute of limitations, even in morals? Lily is past fifty now, and hates men. Even on the principle of set a thief to catch a thief, she can be trusted to mount a good guard on Venice.

It is tiresome, but in the case of Susan Dowlais I shall have to pay her a trifle for Venice's board. Susan is hard up just now. She spends all her spare cash of what Dowlais allows her in furnishing Belle-Belle, not so much with necessities—that's all thoroughly done already—but with luxuries: safety helmets, and breastplates, and new inventions. He will look like a dinner wagon when he gets into the trenches.

Venice has made no objection to my programme so long as I consent to let her put in some time with the Gerald Quains—Ida Leahy that was and her husband. They are not too well off, one knows; at least, less well off than old Susan; but they won't hear of my paying them board, as I offered to do. There was almost a vulgar row about it. I knew that Venice meant to go there, so could not stand out.

Ida said flatly that they wouldn't have Venice at all if I even so much as mentioned payment again. I just had to give in.

I have a queer sort of feeling that Venice may meet her fate there. And now that Gerald is in the Naval Air Service, she may perfectly well meet some one at his house whom I shall not have to disapprove of. And I have Minna Norssex' verdict that Ida's relations and his are all beyond reproach, and some of them quite good people in the intellectual way, which has its prestige too, even in the eyes of the wife of the greatest landowner in the world. She admits that Ida's face shows "race." Of course Minna was American, and don't really know our trademark—or non-trademark, which is more like it. And Ida works for the "Norssex" Ambulance Corps, and goes and uses influence, of which they really seem, she and Gerald between them, to have lots, to get Minna's pet Stretcher Bearer invention taken on by the Government. There's a committee formed for it now. Ida is on heaps of committees, too, and captures the Norssex interest for her own schemes. Committees are all give and take!

Strange, isn't it, how one changes? It used to be the object of my life to keep my daughter out of gangs like the Leahy one, and now here is a Duchess, and the head of our family, interceding for them! Of course your Aunt Minna is a little eccentric—but then she can! American, and one of the biggest Duchesses, it gives you a good pull! Her doings are absolutely beyond cavil and comment, except perhaps from Royalty. I hear however that the lodestar is really Gerald, the *man*. Minna has in her senile way taken an enormous fancy to him. His fortune is made, I tell Ida, if he survives. For Minna has great notions of "improving" Tinsack, making the old part look older—modernizing it in fact. The fortune of any architect she gives the job to is made, if he is without *esprit de corps* enough to care to go pulling an old historic mansion about at the behest of a rich, spoilt American heiress. And Minna always pretends that she accepted Henry, in the first instance, for the sake of his wonderful old family mansion—or mansions. He has six, I counted the other day, besides Norssex House in town and a cygnet farm in Dorset and the shooting at Blairgowrie. Minna says openly that she loves Gerald because he is so terribly good looking, and Ida is sensible and doesn't mind a bit.

I have grown quite attached to Ida these war days, which have brought us all out so as to character. So small and fragile, and yet so reliable and worldly-wise! Whatever one permits oneself to say to her, she never repeats or presumes on, but realizes our different positions and stand-points so clearly that one can really get help from her in one's own problems. Isn't it wonderful that a girl, fairly well born as they say, but certainly bred up in such a very inferior atmosphere, can have been able to take in the culture and ideas of a sect above her? It just shows what cleverness can do! She doesn't talk much, Ida, but is, as I can see, constantly observing.

I get pretty sick of Minna's interference sometimes. Venice is Henry's goddaughter, which allows Minna a certain latitude for abuse of me in her case, but I do think in that of Ilsa it is quite unjustifiable. Why am I to be badgered about Ilsa's comings and goings and, through her, with the rest of the relations, stirred up as one fussy person always does stir up the non-interfering people? Ilsa—alack!—is old enough to manage her own affairs, however ill, and not according to Minna's ideas, or indeed any respectable person's. Minna is writing every day about what she calls "this suicidal trip" to Paris in mid-war, and says to me, with intention, that if her father was well enough to be aware of what Ilsa proposed to do he would forbid it. I have no doubt of it, but as Ilsa is of age and not asking him to put up the money for the journey, or being in the habit of receiving any allowance from him, I don't see what good his forbidding would do.

Does that woman suppose my heart isn't wrung with all sorts of apprehensions when I hear tales, as I do daily, of the sufferings of the poor souls anxious to escape from the Continent, where Hell reigns, while my own daughter is moving Heaven and Earth to be allowed to get into it? I am receiving all the time heart-rending stories of privation of poor invalids on their way back from health resorts in Switzerland, of hordes of frightened people fighting tooth and nail for the last train everywhere, and having to make up their minds to seeing their luggage with all they hold dear left behind on the platform of the Gare Du Nord. They will never see it again. And to think of a specially showy style like Ilsa's exposed to all the insults possible to beauty maidless and unchaperoned! She was always one of those unhappy women who got spoken to, if unaccompanied. So



weak and *laissez-faire*! To save herself trouble, I see her letting herself be carried off to the Fatherland as a prey of some masterful Prussian officer or other, who would for the moment spare her life for the sake of her pretty face, and send her to prison to shred hemp when he was tired of her.

But there are certain discomforts as well as dangers attending the initial stages of the journey. It is my hope that she will be put off by the apprehension of them. People say the official tyranny is awful. Ilsa won't care, when it comes to the point, to wait four or five hours in Bedford Row waiting for her passport, though Goodness knows, both my daughters are capable of any amount of endurance when it is a case of doing what they have set their hearts on. It is Clothes with a big C that moves my eldest daughter; excitement my younger. . . .

Venice goes nearly every night to Charing Cross to see the Belgian refugees come in, drinking strong coffee on purpose to keep her awake for it. She is a person that needs a great deal of sleep, and takes it always. That means lying in bed in the mornings. She has written several poems about what she feels when she sees the refugees arrive. It seems to me almost heartless for any one to go, night after night, to the place of these poor creatures' agony, just to get yourself a fresh sensation and material for a poem. But I don't know. I am not a real authoress. She talks of nothing else but the faces of the women who press to the barrier to see if their dear ones have come. And when they turn away—unsatisfied! . . .

By day she rests, or goes out and does some necessary shopping with me. I insist on that. I can't let her go all to seed and poetry. And as I told you she is becoming interested in clothes. She drags me all over the place after this or that specialty as advertised. I find, on looking at my account, that we spent last week over twenty pounds, mostly on underclothing. That is, she says, a course of action dictated by the war, since we shall not need evening dresses or smart afternoon gowns until after it is over, if then. For then, she says, we shall all be Socialists, and live like the people in Ibsen's plays.

Luckily, Venice isn't always right. She is more full of theories than ever. She considers just now, that no hostess ought to have the heart to invite people to parties or give dinners of more than four, *i.e.* Lily St. Just is always giving

dinners and doesn't always ask Venice! The Schack lighted up, and hansoms and cars driving up to the door with idle civilians while all the nice men are standing up to their knees in mud and blood instead of having them comfortably tucked under Lily's mahogany. If she doesn't take care, she will have her windows broken by the angry populace, who would like to be doing likewise and can't, and choose to put their disappointment on to patriotism.

Audely said mildly that as far as money goes they could. The wife of a working man nowadays can well afford truffles and oysters and Liberty tea gowns—a fresh one every night if she likes."

"But, Audely," I said, "they won't be put on properly, and they'd be yellow satin with pink sleeves, like the dress Lady Peterson received the Women's Federation in the other day. And the oysters and truffles won't be properly cooked or served, for they won't get Anatoles, or miss him, not knowing a good cook when they see him! And that's what annoys them too, knowing they don't know, and get done all along the line with their old money."

"Even that will come," Audely said.

What he said about fresh tea gowns was certainly meant for Venice. Hers never look fit to put on after she has worn them once. Of course they are unsubstantial, papery, frou-frouish things that "shab" easily and fasten in all sorts of unexpected and untoward places, so that they go pretty near to being indecent, and are certainly unsuitable for a young girl living quietly at home with her parents. It is all very well for Ilsa, but Venice is too young to dress like a *demi-mondaine*!

Ilsa is most sarcastic about the "nighties," of which Venice made me get her a dozen, all different, at two-pounds-five each. Ilsa will have it that they are intended to propitiate the Germans if they should come. It seems to me that if it came to that, and they did raid us *à domicile*, the right thing to do would be to be dressed as plainly as possible, so as not to excite their attentions. . . .

Ilsa said, "Venice thinks that to be attractive might save her life!"

I don't blame the child. One does go thinking all sorts of things. Everything seems faintly possible now that the Germans have really gone to war with us. The first night we came to town Venice tells me she was frightened to death,

almost. We had been talking, she and Audely and I, about the possibilities of an invasion, and even occupation of London, and Audely's conversation, picturesque and exaggerated as it always is, must have excited her unduly, for when we had all gone to bed and the house so quiet that one heard all sorts of innocent noises that one never notices by day, she contrived to get herself into a thorough panic. I was so done by the journey that I had gone right off to sleep, and the poor child was too unselfish to wake me. About midnight she imagined that she heard some unusual noises out in the front of the house, and finally worked herself up into thinking that that Count Le Löffel whom we used to meet at Nauheim, and that she insulted so, was going to break into her room, and with his drawn sword, that he used to handle and snigger—I distinctly remember that atrocious gesture of his at Nauheim; it was only fun, but the savagery of the man's face!—saw off her breasts. She had been reading in some paper that they are doing that to the women in Belgium, though everybody doubts it. . . . Ilsa made her very cross by suggesting that in her case there wouldn't be anything to cut into.

I haven't seen the sisters quarrel like that for ages. Venice wouldn't tell Ilsa the end of the story, which was that she went to Audely for comfort, still not liking, even in her bewilderment and fright, to awaken me. How she managed to get herself into Audely's room in that sleep-walking condition without knocking herself against the furniture and waking him, I don't know, and the joke was that even when she tried she couldn't do it, and it wasn't until she had fully awakened herself and satisfied herself that it was nothing, that Audely opened his eyes of himself and they had quite an interesting conversation.

He says she doesn't a bit, but I think she undoubtedly does, feel the War. I think this phase of fussing about her clothes acts as an outlet, but it's expensive and inconvenient for me, for it drives Berrymore to distraction. The girl talks seriously of leaving; she says that since Lady Venice took to dressing up by night as well as by day and taking an interest in her own clothes, instead of leaving it all to me as usual, she finds it impossible to maid us both. Personally I require very little attention. Berrymore used to make me, in her spare time, most of my simple frocks. But that spare time has long ago become a thing of the past, and

all she has done for me since June is to turn a brown foulard.

I can't afford to lose her, grumbler as she is, so I have told her that for the present she can devote herself entirely to her young mistress and let me shift for myself. I am going back alone to the wilds of Scotland, where almost any clothes will do, and she is glad to be left; she hates Scotland like poison.

To-morrow I go. I have dawdled here too long. Of course I should have liked to have had the company of Venice and Ilsa in these times, but they nearly bit my head off, both of them, when I hinted at it. . . . Venice says that times are far too exciting for her to care to be mewed up in the country, and Ilsa sticks to her project of getting to Paris, *coûte que coûte*.

Perhaps if I had insisted on taking Berrymore to Scotland with me Venice would have made up her mind to come too, for she recognizes that she cannot well get on without a maid. . . . But I cannot find it in my heart to play her that trick. She is looking forward tremendously to her three visits. . . .

So my only companion, besides dear old Arles, who isn't well enough yet to be very exciting, will be Effel, who is no good either just now. She is absolutely inconsolable, and as snappy as they make them, because Lucy has gone and enlisted as a private—at forty-two. He won't be put into danger of course, one knows, but still he will be away doing something or other, and possibly in France, which isn't "healthy" for any one just now.

So he is obviously lost to me and Effel, to whom he has engaged himself. Did you ever hear of anything so absurd? Such want of common sense and self-control on his part! Of course one can hardly blame an old maid like Effel for accepting a good offer when she gets one, at forty. I'm patient with her, because in her normal state she is invaluable to me, and I can't help thinking that when the war is over in six months or thereabouts, they will both think better of it and forget that they were ever so silly as to think of leaving their nice comfortable berths with me, to set up housekeeping together on a reduced income, for that is all marriage will come to in their case. They might just as well live on here as usual and see each other as before, while doing their bit for their country in the quiet, unobtrusive way so many of us have to. I've done mine, I'm

sure. I am looking after Venice and trying to marry her to some one nice, and be the mother of heroes. And I've let Audely sell his two cars and hire, and let his moor, and give up his stud, and Beardmore—you know that was his, and we kept it warm for him! Well, it makes no end of a difference to me, I can tell you! One could always count on him, and now he is bare as the rest, with no end of jointures to keep up, and perhaps ties. . . . I have no right to suppose he is different from other men, and that letter to Venice sounded very convincing. . . .

Altogether, Laura, I am at the nadir—or is it the zenith?—of depression. And because after all, since I'm no worse off than any one else, I keep wondering if it is a premonition that something really important is going to befall me.

Is Arles going to be worse?

Is Venice going to make a *mésalliance* while I am away?

Lily St. Just gets hold of me, and hints that Venice has a hopeless passion for some one, and is trying to drown it in lace and silk underclothes? The child certainly mopes, but I think it is only because her dear Ilsa is going to be in danger. Those two adore each other. Venice loves Ilsa far more than she does me. And of course Venice was always anæmic. . . .

Then the break-up of the Lochroyan party was a great disappointment to her, though she has been very good about it, and agrees that war necessities come first and preclude personal desires and likings.

Isn't it funny? What Lily hints about Venice, Venice hints about Ilsa. She talks of Ilsa's sinister visit to Paris, and will have it that it means more than clothes. . . .

No. If I'm sure of any one, it is of solid old Ilsa, with her love troubles and nonsense of that sort all behind her. She has had enough of it. She is like a Vestal Virgin: absolutely impervious to men nowadays, and treats them all as footstools and messenger boys. She is indeed determined on this journey; but then, I know her so well and am up to what Audely calls her "objectives." She is a good Catholic, yet she would sooner change her priest than her dressmaker, and would prefer chiffon to bread any day, if it was a question of choosing between them.

God help us all!

You have never heard me grouse like this in my life, have you, my dear? I am saying it all to you because it does

me some good to get it off my chest. It is so vague that one could not confide it to a doctor, where I generally take all my depressions, being so perfectly sure that they are stomach. This isn't stomach, I know, and at my age one cannot talk of heart! I will say it is the War, as every one else does, and hope that the rest at Lochroyan will set me up again and make me able to be my old jiggity bobbity self again, as my mother used to say.

I dare say some nice thing will happen to correct the horrid ones. Ilsa may get home from Paris all right as usual, with a fine trousseau of clothes; and perhaps Venice may find a nice millionaire for herself—I don't hold out for blood now; one cannot have everything nowadays. By the way, what has become of Mr. Van Pomp? I ought to look him up, but somehow I can't bestir myself—I am what people call "done."

Write to Lochroyan. I am off by the ten o'clock to-morrow. Venice and Ilsa are dining out their several ways, and I shall have, for once, what I like, a *tête-à-tête* dinner with Audely, and get some things settled with him.

## XII

### *From The Lady Venice St. Remy*

PARK CRESCENT.

I NEVER knew anything like Mother ! She is so young ! I think Audely is rather cruel, or perhaps, knowing Mother, he meant to be kind ? But although I had known it since the night of our return, and had kept it carefully to myself, for fun more than for anything else, since no one enjoined secrecy on me, he waited to tell Mother that he was going into the Army—had gone into the Army—till the evening before she was timed to leave for Scotland. And though Audely, who never looks into anybody's face to see what they are feeling, said, that as far as he saw, she took the news with perfect calmness, she appears to have felt it so much that she nearly missed her train next day.

She got up, dressed, and was out of the house by half-past seven, just when the maid was going to her room to call her. No one had an idea where she had gone ; they came and asked me, and I suggested the Caledonian Market that she goes to sometimes very early to pick up bargains, but never so early as that. All our doubts were presently set at rest by her telephoning from Ida's !—saying that she was put late, and was going straight to the station and would Berrymore go from here and take her luggage there at once ? So that was that, and one only hoped she would get off, for she hadn't left herself much time. I wondered why she had been to Ida's, and didn't at all connect it with Audely's commission ; but Ida, with whom I am now staying, has told me what happened, and it explains it all. Poor Mother !

Ida was in her bath, having left Gerald for another five minutes in bed while she had hers first, as usual, when suddenly she heard voices outside the bathroom door. I must tell you, Mother and Ida, for some reason or other, have grown very intimate lately ; and if it wasn't for the poetic justice of

it, I consider I have cause for jealousy. Ida thinks the world of Mother now, though ; I ought to be glad of that. . . .

The voices were those of Mother and Ida's plucky little slavey arguing with Mother, who was a few steps higher on the stairs than the slavey, having majestically brushed past her the moment she opened the front door and asked to see Mrs. Quain.

"She's in her bath, my lady!" the girl kept saying. . . . As if a detail like that would stop Mother if she had a mind to go up! Mother got to the door in a twinkling and spoke through it, and said she must see Ida at all costs, and insisted on Ida's getting out of her bath at once, and if she couldn't let Mother come in, standing at the door and listening to her.

Mother always makes people do what she wants them to, so the result was that Ida, dripping and shivering, had to stand with a bath towel over her little loins while Mother told her impassionedly through the keyhole that Audely had got a commission. It wasn't news to Ida, but all dripping as she was, she had the tact to pretend she didn't know. I couldn't have done that.

That was what Mother had come about ; it appears she had no other business. From her voice Ida judged her on the verge of hysterics. She couldn't be sent home in that condition, so Ida told her to go straight into her bedroom next door and wait there till she herself got some clothes on and could come to her. She forgot, or hoped, that Gerald, hearing the row, would have slithered out of bed, and away. . . .

But he hadn't. By the time Ida had got herself into a bath gown and joined Mother, she found her sitting on Gerald's toes, making polite conversation. He wasn't supposed to know what was the matter, but he did. He has a pretty good *flair* for people's psychology, and knows Mother and Audely both.

Mother having now got the thing off her mind by talking to Gerald and Ida, was quite calm and composed, and only anxious to say a long Good-bye to Ida and Gerald and everybody else in the house, including the slavey to whom she gave a shilling, before she started for her long journey North. Ida was in an awful state of mind, for Mother seemed to have no idea of time, and was missing her train worse every minute. Besides, her face was a little messed up with tears. So Ida made her powder it and 'phone to us, and then she



hauled Gerald out of bed and got him to dress and call a tax and put Mother in it and take her straight to the Great Northern. Neither of them got any breakfast, by the way; and I do think it was selfish of Mother, though Ida declares it wasn't, in the circumstances. She says she's the only one with any heart amongst us, and that she was beside herself with fears for her great friend, who was far too old to go into a business like this, and that it was very plucky of him, and that they are a noble pair, and she respects them both as well as loves them. I thought all that rather cheeky of her, and feel we are drifting apart.

But it *was* rather funny of Mother keeping up and seeming so stoical with us and racing off to Ida, whom she would not once hear of my knowing, in the early dawn, to give way to her! . . . It was because Ida *is* sympathetic, and of course I am not. It is odd how Mother always has a *flair* for the people who can be useful to her. I don't believe she would care so much about Audely's going into the Army if she wasn't losing a useful prop as well! . . . I am afraid I'm cynical! I go farther. I even think that Audely wouldn't have gone into the Army if it hadn't been his anxiety to display *le beau geste*. . . . That you know is his constant pre-occupation.

He had told Ida something of the motives that inspired him. She says he came and had a long talk with her the day after he got his commission. Ida was very emphatic about the sacrifice being unnecessary in his case. She made Audely very angry, for him, saying that he needn't bother, for that this was going to be a boys' war.

"Precisely," he had replied; "and that is a disgrace which I want to stop—so far as I can. Let them take my old blighted carcase for cannon fodder instead."

Cannon fodder—and young boys! That was Audely's obsession. It was the sight of all those young boys Mother and I had collected up there in Scotland going off to be killed that had upset him so. He is soft-hearted, even altruistic, under his selfishness. To see them go, eight from our house in one week! Some meant to join up for the first time, if indeed Germany violated the neutrality of Belgium, and three of them were in the militia already. The fact of their immolation was patent, notorious, and seized the imagination. We used to watch them playing games, tennis and badminton—parlour games, just to keep fit. . . . There were

George Lysons and Paul Wyandotte's son Philip that used to flirt with Ellen Reveley; and there was even that wretched creature Belle-Belle Smith, spoilt but healthy, with the physique of a cherub. Belle-Belle, too, caught the martial contagion, and talked big about "smashing the b——y Huns." He was one of the first to say it. But George L. was a real man, and when he talked of fighting one knew he would do it thoroughly. Audely liked George so much, and he must have hated the thought of that fine open chest being made a target for bullets, of those long limbs blasted by shells, and that face battered out of semblance of humanity! I remember he sprained his ankle rather badly once, and the idea of the delicate instep twisted and askew, as it was for the time, affected Audely extraordinarily. He says he dislikes the idea of a rick or a sprain far more than the sight of blood. I suppose it is that Audely is such a great lover of physical beauty—the perfect form! It goes with style in literature, which he thinks more of than of matter. Perhaps that's one of the reasons he admires Ilsa and is so tolerant of her little ways? And Mother's figure is not at all negligible either! I, alone, of the family, stoop, and am ungraceful and ungracious. But then—I write!

He told Ida that after having pottered all his life he had made up his mind never to potter again.

"By pottering I suppose you mean looking after Lady Arles' affairs?" Ida had chaffed him, and he had replied:

"Oh, as doctors say when they go out of practice, I shall always be happy to run Lady Arles' errands—if I come back alive, that is, which I feel I shall not."

Just like Audely; because he is going into the Army, he is killed already. The worst is always to happen to him; he is always strained to top notch! Ida and Gerald almost weary me nowadays with singing the praises of Mother and Audely. You would think they were Tristram and Iseult, or Aucassin and Nicolette, at least. . . . Gerald even goes so far as to say that because of Mother's aristocratic pluck and our boys' carrying out their feudal obligations so adequately, he is being converted to the acceptance of the monarchic and aristocratic principle.

Meantime Ida and I go about with Audely to help him to choose his things. It is rather fun. I am getting acquainted

with all sorts of mysterious words and names of hitherto unknown objects. A "tunic" I had so far always associated with tight-rope dancing and obese gentlemen with torsos—I find it is what I should call a glorified Norfolk jacket. Then there are "slacks" and "puttees"; and, isn't it a majestic compound of words?—a "British warm."

It is a short-waisted garment like a little boy's first coat after he has been put into trousers. I tried on Audely's, just as I tried on Le Löffel's great military mantle at Nauheim a year ago. To think that I have been muffled up to my chin and down to my knees in a garment that now covers one of the enemies of my country! I might have married Le Löffel! I almost wish I had from one point of view. I should have been in Germany by now, and seeing theirs!

Then a "valise"! I had certain preconceived ideas about a valise, something small and distinguished that one carried about with one, which one's servant stole and which was the first thing to be searched for compromising documents. I found it to be something much more woollen and domestic—practically an entire sleeping compartment. Then there were binoculars, patent prismatic water compasses, that were difficult to get, but Ida and I clubbed together to get them for him. He had lots of revolvers already—you can't travel in the East without them—but he had to have a sword—for parade, not to fight with. Ida is going to keep Audely's for him when he goes to the front. He has promised to deposit it with her. I would have, if he had asked me, but he didn't. It is the most hideous and vulgar thing you ever saw, like a handle of a hired knife and fork from a caterer's; but still, it would have been rather romantic to cherish it till he came back. I rather like the idea of living in the house with a sword. It might stir in the cupboard when something exciting was happening to its master over there, like the executioner's axe in the German legend.

Then we all went to the photographer and were photographed in groups. Audely of course in khaki. It doesn't suit his fair hair at all, though it goes with his blue eyes well enough. It is a pity they are so cold. It seems to paralyse the rest of his face. . . .

It is all rather fun, these details that I get at first hand. There was nobody to help and go about with him but Ida and me. Mother away, Ilsa in Paris, and Gerald frightfully busy with his invention. He is working in

the Admiralty, and gets home in the evenings dog-tired, and just wants to put his head on Ida's shoulder and be petted. I really rather hate seeing people so fond of each other—it seems to me so unpicturesque—so I go out as much as I can, and leave them to themselves. I get Audely to take me out to restaurants as he used to take us all. If Mother knew, she would worry, and bid me try to raise a chaperon. But Lily won't stir out in the evenings now, and Susan Dowlais sits in a dark room and cries over Belle-Belle, and Ida is otherwise engaged. Even if I promised Mother I would, I shouldn't be able to keep my promise.

I feel rather lonely, doing nothing, and should like to get rid of the fetish that I am not strong enough, which is sheer nonsense. But it is difficult to find any job that doesn't take up *all* one's time. They don't like you to agree for less than twelve hours a week at anything, and I *must* keep a little time for my own life, don't you think?

But Mother is really so *attendrie* with the war and Audely, that she would stand almost anything that included him. To be Audely and an officer in His Majesty's Army covers every sin possible, and certainly the minor one of giving me my dinner at little respectable restaurants such as Audely chooses in preference to the big disreputable ones. To be caught at the Polly-olly—short for Oi Polloi—for instance, would not be half so bad as being seen alone at the smart big evening-dress places where shady couples show themselves on purpose to *afficher* a divorce, so Audely tells me. It is funny how worldly Audely is under his socialistic, romantic veneer!

I fancy Mother, now, would forgive even a full-dress dinner at the "Spitz," or an *undress* one in the Vorticist room in Soho. She always goes Nap on any principle she adopts, and her last pronouncement is that no English-woman ought to refuse anything in the world to the man who is fighting and giving his life for her and hers. I should say that this theory might land her—and me—in some very strange predicaments! And of course, even in these hurried days, the useless people who are left, talk. They have nothing else to do. The club gossips and Mrs. Grundy—who, I am sure, never hides *her* eyes behind a steaming coffee-urn—is always with us. She spies us two together, I have no doubt. The poor little attenuated world, no

longer with a big W, or a purr, has however all its claws left sticking out, and is wondering already what the lady in Madrid says to it all, and if I am going to snatch him from her. It is rather fun. Nothing is more than rather, now.

I'm sure Audely never thinks of it. If it wasn't for the honour and glory of the thing I should have a very dull time, eating my good dinners by the side of an unresponsive man, who just pays for them, puts my cloak on for me, and takes me home to Ida's without "coming in." That is what Audely does. When he talks, it is all about the War. He is deeply moved and excited about that, now that he is in it. No more cynical talk about Germany's wonderful cleverness and staying power, or diatribes against Our Imbecile Government, and prophecies that every one of us, including himself and the enemy, will be tired of it in six months. He is now as deadly in earnest over it as a boy over a game of cricket to the death, or a mortal football match in which the players never come out of the "scrum" alive. One is amused and interested at first, but one doesn't care for a grown man to be so very like a schoolboy—or even a child, and I quite foresee that Audely will bore me in a very short time. He will just have to fall back on Mother, the tireless sympathizer, who will adore him in every incarnation that he likes to imagine himself into.

There was a really exciting three quarters of an hour when he finally left to join his regiment by the night train at one o'clock!

The great lonely station was like one of those engravings by Piranesi, representing vast spaces full of unnamable machinery; joists of devil cranes jutting out high over head in the shattered roof; dim shapes of the damned flitting in and out of the dark shades, crossing the light spaces now and again, to be swallowed up once more in the hollow shell of blackness; men stooping fearfully, as if afraid, or moving, roped in chains. . . They were only porters! . . .

And Ida and I, two frail, useless women, walking each side of our knight, whose armour we had buckled on, speeding him into the Valley of the Shadow of Death to fight with Apollyon. The great gaunt station seemed the portal of Hell. . . .

And yet, when one thought of it, one knew that Audely wasn't, anyhow, going straight to the front; might never go,

because of his age; might not stand the preliminary training? Who knows? Only one just didn't choose to think of it from such an unpicturesque point of view, or put it to oneself that he was for the present a grown-up schoolboy going off to be a member of a military class and learn lessons! It really is part of the training: reading and writing and acquiring a smattering of history and geography.

I don't pity Audely. He will have the greatest fun for the next six weeks at all events: a grown man going back to school, bathing and cycling and motoring about between his lessons. It will be six months before he is ready to go out, and by that time the war will be over.

By the way, when you write back, do impress this upon Mother as much as you can. To judge from her letters, she is in a morbid state of hyper-anxiety, praying at a *prie-Dieu*, wearing a coarse chemise to mortify the flesh, leaving off after-dinner coffee—she doesn't smoke so she can't leave off that—but she honestly refuses to eat a chocolate. She is worrying about Audely and his fate, which isn't a fate at all, for he isn't a really romantic character; that is his curse, for he likes to pose as one, and it leads him into strange complexes and contradictions.

This new apotheosis of his is very well staged, and helps him to that aspect which he desires to present. It's telling. I found it really very queer, to stroll about the platform for nearly half an hour with an absolute stranger. For Audely looked different, and in spirit was quite aloof. He was already gone miles away from us, because of his own special power of detachment, which irritates Mother beyond endurance. She goes in for asking him questions, prodding him up generally, getting him into the main stream of conversation by hook or by crook, and to have him not hear, or turn round with a patient "What, dear?" as of a seer disturbed at his best vision, drives her mad.

His uniform changes him completely. I left him with Ida once, and walked away to a little distance and had a good look at him. I approved of him. He has very straight legs, and wrapped in puttees they reminded me of a South American hunter. I don't care for the affected cut of the knickerbockers, bagging out at the sides like the panniers of a woman's dress, though it's only what they used to wear out shooting. And the square tabard-like coat suggested the caricatures people draw to amuse children, in three lines, of

Henry the Eighth, only Audely is not particularly stout. And the cap, very stiff and flat, with the hair shaved so closely beneath it, would be like Henry the Eighth's bonnet, only it is not worn on one side in the rakish manner indicated in Holbein's pictures, which make even a Tudor king look vulgar.

It was time. There was a suggestion of a whistle. . . . It sounded secret and mysterious, but it is never more than a suggestion at the best of times, is it? . . . and a cry. . . . "All in!"

Audely stooped—to Ida; he didn't need to stoop to me—and gave us both a kiss (I didn't know till then he kissed Ida!), and got into the carriage, where an obsequious guard was stowing his nice new-looking green bags and packages. . . .

Audely tipped him royally, and then stood at the window, fearfully self-conscious—and saying inane things. . . .

Then the train slid out of the station, bearing away our knight—to Fordingbridge only! Yet, bless me, I had tears in my eyes! Audely had got his effect finely.

"He's a dear!" Ida said, grateful, I suppose, for her kiss.

## XII

### *From The Lady Arles*

LOCHROYAN.

FOR my sins, dear, here I am back at quiet old Lochroyan. Like a house of the dead it is, and your father, the invalid I have come to nurse, by far the liveliest and cheeriest person in it. The nurse is a trial—they all are—and old Maggie very depressing and portentous. She will have it that the ghost of Anatole visits her every night, and she is sure he is a "dead corp" by now. It is no use my telling her what I know now, that he is only in prison. Maggie sees him in her dreams, frowning at her, for she was the one to set the "sodgers" on to him by telling them that he was away over the roof of the laundry house. For all other company I have Mrs. Lysons of Aldivalloch, who comes over here in deep mourning for her son George. . . .

Here alone without Venice, or Effel, or Audely, I have a very poor time. I console myself only with thinking that Arles needs me, though of course he is going on perfectly well in the health line. He has a magnificent constitution. I sit beside his couch and think over old days and what a fine man he used to be, and what a magnificent chest for orders! I shall never forget my pride as we two walked up the long vestibule leading to the top of the staircase in Arlington Street to where Lady Salisbury stood to receive us! It was a long and trying exhibition, that few yards of red baize, to those ill-equipped with looks or presence, and Arles and I, or so I flatter myself, came out of it well.

And it was I who laid my partner low! I pray to be forgiven, and realize that though I have been let off easy by Fate, Arles is now, and must remain, my first consideration.

If it wasn't for this conviction, do you know, dear, I hardly think I should have been able to tear myself away from town. I have to support my resolve by remembering



my crime against Arles and the country. I harboured a spy and gave my husband a stroke. I keep rubbing this into myself whenever the "urge" to get back to the centre of events is too forcible. It is only now and then that it comes with overwhelming strength that I can hardly resist. Before I left here, I had instituted a neat little arrangement for casual praying in my bedroom—in a corner, with curtains arranged, and hangings, so as to give the idea of a private chapel. I now take my worries there. You'll say, if Papa is well there are no worries, or ought not to be. But there is the leaving of my darling Venice to her own devices, and the not seeing Audely off, and attending myself to all his little comforts. Venice is supposed to be doing it, but Venice has no idea of what a man wants: the little attentions and pettings that I could have given, so as to make Audley think that the people he leaves behind are caring for him! . . . And I have to trust to that careless child for all accounts of him and how it has gone. And she is not interested in him; and although she saw him off, with Ida, they only did it to please me and because he timed his departure, so Ida says, at one in the morning, which amused Venice and lent interest for her to a rather commonplace proceeding.

The whole thing was rather culpably rushed on me; and perhaps, as a very old friend of Audely's, I ought to have resented his abrupt way of telling me, a little more. For really Audely carries casualness to a fault. Only the night before I left for Scotland he told me, as if he had said he was going to a race meeting or a shoot. . . .

"By the way, Beaty, I've got my commission to go and fight the b—y Huns."

Not one word more, and one a word that he ought hardly to have used to me. But one couldn't be angry very long with Audely; besides, to borrow a word from his dictionary, he is so b—y brave to go in at all!

It is Venice who has given him "beans." She writes to him and says she is astonished at him, of all people, suddenly developing the murder lust, and talking about bloody Huns and mad dogs and so on. She says, once you begin to insult a country you can't do anything with it in the way of parleying. But can one do anything with a mad dog except pitchfork it?

And when I tax her with the rumours of massacres of Belgian civilians, which is beginning to get through to us,

she denies the reports, or says they are greatly exaggerated. There is that shocking story of the people being driven along in front of the advancing armies of Germans, as a kind of living screen, to prevent the soldiers on their own side from firing at them! And the children without hands! Venice utterly scouts the idea of such inconceivable cruelty as that! . . .

Well I can conceive it, of *those* people! I remember a horrid German tale I heard often when a child. The people who read it to me thought nothing of it, nor did I; I didn't understand it. I used to call it the *Hanseless Maiden*. A girl has her hands cut off by her cruel relations and is sent out into the forest to get what food she can by grubbing up roots. Of course the tragedy of it is that she has no hands to grub with. They grew again in the story, of course. But that simple peasants could imagine such a thing, and tell their children about it over the fireside, suggests that it is one of their recognized methods of punishing enemies!

Well, even if things are exaggerated, and perhaps they are, there are one or two absolutely authenticated incidents of the raid into Belgium. It seems to me that the blood of even one dead baby spitted on a bayonet cries aloud to Heaven, and practically indicts a whole nation of those that do it. And the revolting indecencies! The desecrations! For God's sake, say I, let us get the whole disgusting monkey-house bundled off the face of the good, clean earth as soon as possible! I may be a fool . . . war is war, of course. All I venture to think is that a people whose folktales are brutal are coarser than others. They are like butchers, to whom killing is part of the day's work and no particular treat. Even if we look on them as drunken soldiers who know not what they do . . . or say that people are not accountable for what they do in hot blood, these crimes are done in cold! They state that the excesses are done by command—orders from on high, given by people one has known, severities preached by professors who have enjoyed one's hospitality. There was that splendid creature Willamowitz Something or other-dorf, who admired Venice, and paid her attention in his spoilt, indifferent way. He came to roast goose at Park Crescent, once—he and Professor Oncken that year they were over here to the Literary Congress. And now these

whilom guests are preaching the massacre of us all! And in Rome once, Ilsa reminds me, Bernhardt came to lunch, and how I took a strong dislike to him. Willamowitz certainly was fascinating . . . but that doesn't excuse his egging on his pupils to bloodshed.

The idea of my little girl palliating it! At least, that is what her letters, which I read sitting by the father's sick bed, sound like. She says educated women are bound to take the philosophical view. Then I'm sorry I educated her, that's all.

It's Mrs. Leahy, I am convinced. Ida herself is a dear, but that mother of hers is mad, and ought to be shut up. That kind of talk breeds Conscientious Objectors. These irresponsible Higher-Thought people don't know the harm they do with impressionable young people. If only Audely wasn't away, or Ilsa back from Paris, or Arles well enough to be moved! It is terrible to a woman of my stamp to live inactive here, away from happenings. Everything seems, according to the papers, to change each hour; even the laws of physical geography desert us. One has come to feel as if the moon might even cease to control the tides. We may all come to suffer famine, rapine, and sudden death in spite of the valiancy of our young men who are devoting themselves wholesale to saving England—covering their vassals, whom they have sworn to protect. . . . Venice's mediaeval talky-talky, half play, half earnest, comes back to me now. She used to hope that those times would come back, that the King of England would ride out in full armour at the head of his knights as at Cressy and Poitiers, on foreign soil and through foreign cities. Well, it will have to be German soil, and German cities this time. How funny it cannot help being! All the new peers—for we must not forget that we have admitted a lot of grocers and contractors to share our ancient privileges—saddled, booted, and spurred, riding out to war on their heavy battle-chargers, with slogans and fierce cries of "Onwards!"

I fancy in some cases the King might deplore the Birthday Honours List. It strikes me he has slightly lost sight of the feudal idea, as Venice explains it to me!

Still, so long as Our Order breeds men like Audely and women like Venice to bind their favours on their heaulmes for them, we shall get along all right. The Aristocracy will make good, and save Old England yet. It is a great and

proud thought. How I wish we had an estate still worth speaking of, and that Romanille was alive to do his part! I should prefer to see one's own men off one's own land, riding out voluntarily under their feudal lord's leadership—so much more picturesque than Conscription, which would do away with all our standing. We hold it on that tenure originally, so Venice says. But if so, we are sadly undermanned. And there is a dearth of leaders in our family. Of all the male relations, there is only Cousin Henry that I can think of who could muster forty men born and bred on his estate that consider themselves bound to follow him to the wars. He would go fast enough himself, although he is over age and has married an American parvenu. . . .

By the way, Audely's valet, who left him so suddenly, was, it turns out, a German, and got away to join the army over there. He was supposed to be a Swiss. What with Anatole and the Bamberger woman, we haven't done badly as a family in the way of spies, and it behoves us to be specially careful. I hear everywhere of spies being taken out of this and that house all round about; I suppose the tale of our Anatole has got transferred, and now comes back to us as an independent incident. Some of my servants, although they are not *enemy* aliens, have to walk seven miles every other day to report themselves at Kirkmichael, and they fill the rest of the day with grumbling. Yet we can't drive them in; there isn't an ounce of petrol left to us, or indeed in the country round. Every one of them is difficult to do with except Léocadie, the French under housemaid, who follows me about with loving eyes. She has adored *Les Anglais* ever since we "came in." She really thought there was a doubt of it, and I dare say all of her nation did, which doesn't sound very creditable for us! She confided to me that she had dreaded in the beginning whether "Sir Grey" would permit us to do so; but now:

"*Puis qu', Miladi a bien voulu nous aider, ça sera bientôt fini!*"

I confess it is a pleasure nowadays to be *au mieux* with any one, even if it be only a servant. One feels so lonely and abandoned, even though one is doing one's best for everybody, as far as one sees it.

It is, I gather, over a week since Audely left London to join the Fifth Northhamshires. Fancy my having to *gather* anything about Audely! He never was a good correspondent,

but this might surely be considered rather a special occasion for writing! He is going to treat it like any of his other absences, I suppose—not worth dilating on. When he is actually out it will be much more annoying; but he isn't there yet, and while he is still only a probationer there is hope, and I shan't let myself worry too much. I do, though. Pooh! I dare say no one is in better case than I am, not even the lady in Madrid. Audely is so neglectful of these sort of feelings in his friends. I dare say, poor thing, she is crying her eyes out over there, because she can't get to him. Though now I think of it, Spain, being neutral, she could! Perhaps he has forbidden her to try? There seems to be a husband who might object. So one gathered from the letter Audely wrote to Venice. . . .

That's all very well, for her, but I should have been by his side in two twos, husband or no husband, if Audely had been *my* lover.

As for Venice, to whom he wrote that most beautiful love letter, Venice must be as cold as a frog and as dry as a mummy. She writes about his departure as calmly as if he were a schoolboy going back to school. Why, even if he is killed, she has the written assurance of his love, at any rate, and will have it to read over and look at, for as long as she lives. I have only got a carbon copy. I sent *you* the best, and of course the original was put back carefully in the blotter by Effel after her work was done.

Of course, speaking in Venice's defence, one cannot deny that Audely is of a rather fickle disposition; and Venice would demand a man's whole heart or nothing. I dare say she wrote and told him so? . . .

Poor dear, brave boy! I know what drove him into the Army as well as if he had told me. It was the sight, rubbed into him during that month at Lochroyan, of all the most precious examples of the race—scions of all the best blood in England—rushing to their doom, as you may say, and he, perfectly strong and healthy, sheltering behind those odd years of his, over forty, which “let him out,” if he had cared to think so. I think when Bertie Corfe joined up, sacrificing his brilliant career at Oxford, and Lord Cartmel's only son—neither of them a year over eighteen—Audely's great heart cracked. And then there was that freak, Belle-Belle Smith, who might have lived in luxury for all the rest of his days (at Susan Dowlais' expense), leaving off all his

cosmetics and champagne baths and putting himself at the service of the nation that had after all let his father practically die of starvation. An unsuccessful paving-stone artist. It was a sad story that I will tell you one day. Susan Dowlais literally picked him off the streets, where he was trying to help his mother by running errands for a potato salesman. Recognizing the magnificent potentialities of his physique, she sent him to school. . . .

I realize that all those weeks when war was on the *tapis* merely, and Audely was enduring life with us in this roaring *milieu* of youthful enthusiasm, the reason why he was so taciturn was that he was maturing the wild idea of immolating himself on the altar of sacrifice! I alone, I believe, am able to conceive the emotions of baffled manhood—of suppressed patriotism that surged in his breast as he golfed and badmintoned and bridged as if that was all he, as an old crock, was good for! . . .

The truth is, I have such a dreadful lot of time to think here. I used to long for it in the days of my busy *mater-familias* career. It is like living in, not a tomb, for Arles is better, but at least a backwater. . . . I have continually to remember that it is my own fault that I am here. If I hadn't retained Anatole, Arles wouldn't have had a stroke and I could have been in town with the girls. I must accept my penance. Still, one can't help one's thoughts—Audely's insouciance and neglect, and those two young women caring to stop enjoying themselves in London and leaving me here to mind the house that I took and the invalid I made, solely on their account! I don't expect Ilsa to put herself out to keep her old mother company. She always did go her own way, but from Venice I did expect a little natural affection. . . .

I have just had a telegram from Ilsa to say that she is back from France and is coming on here after a couple of nights in town. So cancel my groushings, which really were unjustifiable, and in my next letter I will give you Ilsa's news. It is funny that it is Ilsa who is coming here to cheer her mother in her loneliness, and not Venice. I suppose her affairs have gone wrong and she hasn't been able to get any clothes, and wants a bosom to lie upon. A mother's is the best for that, not apoplectic old gentlemen or beardless boys.

## XIV

### *From The Lady Arles*

LOCHROYAN.

ILSA is not come to cry on my breast, that is the joke of it; and yet she hasn't brought a stitch from Paris. That isn't what she went for. She says she has brought back something I shall like far better—a husband!

The child has engaged herself to Archie Dunkeron, the Master of Cramont, who was here with us only a month ago, and she is desperately, passionately, in love with him and has been all the time. She looks rather altered—thinner, and doesn't drawl so much. Her eyes, that used to be rather blue, dead, and fishy-looking, somewhat spoiling the effect of the *tout ensemble* of her face, so people said, are now very bright. What Love does! Venice will never feel it like that. It is the quiet ones that go so perfectly mad over and absorbed in a love-affair. Ilsa thinks of Archie all day, and screams at night over dreams of his danger. He is leaving Paris and Barral Quenford, who doesn't at all like giving him up to the air service. He has got a week before he definitely joins, I gather, and is coming here. They intend to revisit all the scenes of their meetings in those days before he had "spoken." That is to say, the places where she spent a portion of her time with him in silence. For if Archie didn't tell her of his love, he certainly told her nothing else. He is quite the most taciturn creature I ever came across—absolutely no small talk. But his Ilsa likes it apparently, and for its sake is enduring for the first time a *tête-à-tête* with her father and mother in patience until he is able to come to her; and there will not be much babble even then, for, I suppose, having got his proposal made, he will now choose to wait until it is absolutely incumbent on him to speak once more formally and say in church, "I will."

Venice writes by this day's post. She seems awfully pleased and excited by the news, although Ilsa says that in town she took it very calmly, not to say grudgingly.

She is such a child. She seems to think that all Ilsa's troubles are over instead of just beginning. For although Archie Dunkeron is a charming fellow and Ilsa's complete equal, and it is all most suitable in every way—but one, he has not got a penny. And Ilsa, who has lived so expensively (at other people's expense) for years!

The Dunkerons are Jacobites, and were out, man and boy, in the Forty-Five, and their lands attainted, so that there is hardly any money left, and jointures to pay to a lively old mother and two sporting aunts out of it. Cramont Brig is an old mouldering pele tower where pleasure parties picnic in summer. It's not liveable in, as it is. It could be restored, but where is the money to come from? . . . One conjectures that that may be the reason poor Archie is so silent? Having any sort of painful family history behind you is apt to have that effect.

Yes, I am dreadfully afraid that, however much in love, Ilsa, with her tastes, won't be able to stick to him. . . . Indeed, from the monetary point of view, she would be showing her sense to give him up. It would, however, in my opinion be a very great mistake. Her case is special. With her funny record she may never have another chance of a man like that: her equal in rank, straight, as far as she knows, and who is willing, nay eager, to look over the past. It is a triumph for her golden hair, which I suppose has brought him up to the point? Men go so mad about gold that isn't fake, and Ilsa's is her own, and not touched up at all. She inherits it from me, and I attribute all my own successes in life to it. The zest for it answers, I fancy, to the innate sense of contrast we have, all of us, deep down. Audely had a theory which I never quite understood—something about one of the evidences for the duality of the world—Ormuzd and Ahri-man. . . . *Je n'en sais rien*; but certainly Archie is as dark as the night and Ilsa fair as the morning. . . .

All the time that they were here together, I gather, he made no sign. But she knew, she says, by a kind of lover's prescience. She just kept quite quiet and bided her time, and was much amused at the low opinion we all had of her power of attracting, regarding her as quite on the shelf.



Then when war had definitely broken out, she knew that the moment had come, and dashed off to Paris, aware that it only needed some sort of fortuitous meeting to bring out the proposal that was awaiting her over there from that leal heart and true. Reserved men you always have to give some sort of lead to, and she did. Quietly meeting him in due course at the Embassy, she told him that she was over for clothes, and would literally live at the Galerie Lafayette. He took the hint, hung about there all day, and sure enough met her quite by accident, and proposed in the Mercerie among the reels of cotton and the staylaces hanging from the counter.

And now, Laura, to be practical, what is she going to admit to? There has got to be some sort of admission or confession. It is like "declaring" a small portion of anything really glaring, and hard to smuggle at the Customs, so as to get the lot through. He may have heard quite a lot about her; he may have heard very little! Whatever it is, he will not want to believe it, but, lover like, will go straight to her for denial or confirmation, as he will put it. Denial a lover hopes for, and nearly always gets. But it means nothing, of course. How should it? It is absurd to ask any one to incriminate themselves and not put as good a face upon the matter as possible, especially in the case of a woman. But the more a man cares for a girl, the more he feels sure of getting the exact truth about her from herself, expecting her thus to be the agent of her own disaster. They *will* do it, however, and always have, the best and most sensible of them, from Lohengrin downwards.

So it seems to me that out of the mountain of scandal that jealous people have probably filled that poor boy up with, Ilsa may find it wiser to admit to a part. She ought to tell him something; it would strengthen his hand so. It is better to get in first, tell your own story—as much of it as you think they will be able to stand—watching their faces and gestures as you go on. . . . Then when he is properly primed, the world may just come along with its insinuations, that are so much worse than the truth which *he knows*. The scandalmongers find the impregnable armour of complete knowledge arrayed against them as soon as they begin. "Yes, yes," Archie will say, "I have listened to you quietly, and now get out!" Or "I have made inquiries and satisfied

myself that you are merely spreading base reports of a lady without the slightest foundation."

It will be a mother's business to show her daughter—like the Mother in *Rose Mary*—how to be open without being unpicturesque, how to take the grotesqueness out of things. There's no doubt about it, a girl who is "standing" for marriage must give her man something to go to the country with, as it were. He has got to swagger, so as to carry it off, and so must she. Swagger always daunts mean people, and the people who want to avert a marriage out of sheer mischief-making are always mean. The Arles swagger is notorious—Barral des Baux began it when he sold his town to Charles Quint. The idea is to be above suspicion, and don't care if I did do it, whatever it was!

What was it the Roman Emperor said? I learnt it at school. "*Ego sum Rex Romanorum*. . . . I am an egotist, and govern Rome as I like!" That has always seemed to me a safe position to take up, and what Sigismund applied to grammar can easily be applied to the rules of morality. It is only a special sex morality after all, which Ilsa in her heyday, like Sigismund, walked through and over-rid when it suited her.

She has gone to bed tired, and we have not had our first serious talk yet. But I am sure I can help her. I haven't lived all my life in diplomatic circles for nothing. And besides, we are in a war, and there will be a war morality if it goes on, if I am not mistaken. Ilsa can catch on to that, and take all modern facilities as being retrospective.

There are the new Divorce Laws. What a lot of heart-break, and relations' upsetting, would be saved if women would stop jabbing each other, and be sensible enough to avail themselves of the new prospective clauses.

But there, again, He is always the difficulty. Our fatal fondness and desire for a man about, however brutal or faithless, it is that stops the way and discounts every precaution that our legislators take on our behalf. Women, as a rule, don't care to avail themselves of the loopholes of escape it is sought to provide for them. They don't really want to escape when it comes to the point, and let some other woman have their source of tribulation!

One sees that, one way or another, it will go on the same—the same woman door-mat for Him if he chooses to come back and say a civil word or two, and presently, when He

finds it irksome to be civil any longer, Him riding away on the wings of the law, "to new and more voluptuous doormats," as Ilsa says.

The poor girl, through the circumstances of her own case, has no illusions.

## XV

### *From The Lady Arles*

LOCHROYAN.

ARCHIE has come, and that makes it very difficult for me to get any conversation with my daughter. They have got a list of the places they went to together (not even alone) the time he was here before, and they solemnly revisit one or the other of them every day, duly ticking off the different pilgrimages as they accomplish them. They are generally late for lunch, if they come back for it at all. That is one of the signs of how deeply in love Ilsa is, for I have never known her miss a meal for anybody. When they do turn up, in any sort of time, they seem fearfully exhausted (though I am sure it isn't with talking), and just sit and stoke in silence. If it wasn't for a moment or so at night, when Ilsa comes into my room to brush her hair, I should have a dreary time, boxed up with such an extra dull and absorbed pair. But something of the sort one expects, or ought to. I had to do it for you and Peter, but you weren't nearly so bad as Ilsa and Archie. You were just out of the schoolroom, and I suppose one doesn't take it so seriously when one gets it young.

But with Ilsa it is the pent-up passion of a lifetime. It represents her last chance of enjoying the sensation of being all in all to some one. She knows, and I know, that if this particular affair doesn't come off, she will have to give up all hope of marrying.

For I suppose that is it, after all—the intense longing for something stable that made even George Eliot rush into marriage at fifty or so with a young man. Ilsa is older than Archie, but not much. She plays up to him very well, though I rather believe that she has frittered away her power of loving to a certain extent, and finds it difficult to produce enough emotion to quite fill the bill.

He may be rather exigent, this tall stick of a fellow who hardly ever speaks, but just sits glowering at her with his deep black sunken eyes as if he could eat her. There is no doubt about his ability to give full measure of love and overflowing. It must be very gratifying to Ilsa, and one can't wonder that she is keen on it and him.

I do believe Archie, though Scotch, has Spanish blood in him; he couldn't be so passionate and dark, if not. Weren't any of the Armada people wrecked on the coast of Scotland? Wasn't there a battle of Largs? Could a Don have tampered with his pedigree, as poor dear Lady Colin used to say, of hers? Any way, the contrast between her fairness and his duskiness is so marked that even the village people here notice it. They take a great deal of interest in "The Lovers," and follow their movements and tell me about them, quite civilly. One old Goody, about four miles from here—I go long walks, by myself, alas!—told me that she often sees Lady Ilsa and her braw sweetheart down by the brae together, very lover-like, him fishing in the bit burn and she putting worms on the hook with her own white hands. Shepherds tell me they see them sheltering in some sheep stell or other, over the hills and far away, in the pouring rain, laughing and behaving as if 'twas nowt but a passing shower.

In bonnie Scotland, it never passes, but is permanent, so it is obviously not so much a case of shelter as of getting under the same plaidie!

Funny what love will do! Ilsa, giving up all her lazy ways and self-indulgent habits for a man! Time was she wouldn't walk a step, and certainly not in the rain! Even her absurd flimsy fanciful clothes seem to have gone into the rag bag; she says she is going to make cushion covers and window blinds of her Paquin dresses as soon as she gets a house, and she now wears nothing but Harris tweeds and stout ugly boots, because he likes her to.

She brought back no clothes from Paris. She says, again, he didn't care for her to, and that, to me, is rather an indication of how he is going to regard her past, so bound up with Paris *frou-frou* and meretricious dressing. She wears no jewels now, except her plain engagement ring, with a single sapphire (I've heard that that's the stone that stands for the virtue of chastity), and sometimes the great fat jade fetish that Audely had set for her as a pendant,

She certainly looks twice the woman she did, only thinner, if you understand what I mean. She used to smother her face with cream, and powder thickly on top. No need, for she is naturally white as milk. But all that make-up has been left off, and she shows a nice brown flush on her white skin where the wind, more than the sun, tans her. However tanned and wind-beaten she is, Ilsa will always be a startlingly fair woman. Breathe it not, but she looks rather like Germania of the Denkmal on the Niederthal we all climbed up to see last time we were on the Rhine. Ah me! Those days of yore, when we went about, Ilsa, Audely, Venice, and I, all talking and laughing and quizzing the Germans, and here I am boxed up with Ilsa and this solemn young owl! And she used to be so amusing, letting off all sorts of sayings that seemed simple and rather obscure, but when you took them to bed and slept on them, you saw the devilry in them. I suppose she is afraid of her Archie's considering them carefully, in and out, and perhaps getting upset. So now, instead of our *Journal pour Rire*, as we used to call her, we have a thing more like *Simplicissimus*, which is never in the least funny or even *risqué*. . . .

N.B.—Audely used to say it was—pornographic, was his word.

Arles gets steadily better and we shall be able to move him soon. I leave the lovers to their own devices all day, relying on my heart-to-heart talk over my bedroom fire in the evenings with Ilsa. She is quite alive to the difficulties ahead of her. Archie has literally only got his pay to count on, and why on earth does he leave Quenford? Quenford is awfully fond of him, and trusted him, and sent him on all sorts of secret missions. I don't wonder at that: a man you can't get anything out of, even in peace time! But he seems to be wild to go into the air. Perhaps it appeals to him as a silent profession?

Ilsa is selling all her furs and jewels. When she came up here she was exhausted, for during the two days she was in town she ran about trying to dispose of things to the best advantage. I am surprised to hear the sums some of the jewellery was valued at. Though Archie knows that she is getting rid of them *at a price*, he is not bound to know the exact figure. She says he doesn't approve of her selling anything. The silly enthusiastic boy thinks they can *both*

live on the air, and wants to have her come to him in her shift, as they say.

Ilsa's shift being usually composed of a whole piece of lace, is more of an asset than most women's—mine or even Venice's; though Venice, as I told you, has lately, for some reason or other, wakened up to the importance of being dainty, and has been a serious drain on my purse in consequence.

You will say I always get back to Venice. But I am disposing of Ilsa and her affairs first. An engagement always carries all else before it, and puts the bride-elect in the forefront for the moment. . . . I am afraid Venice has been unequal to the position, merely temporary as it is, to judge from Ilsa's rather bitter comment on her reception of the news.

"Oh yes, of course, it was a bit of a shock to Venice—my suddenly, at the eleventh hour, becoming It. You have brought her up so carefully to consider herself the only person of any importance in the house; my brief apotheosis naturally upsets her."

I asked her what she meant by apotheosis.

"One of Venice's pet long words," she said. "It merely means that I am having my little hour—every woman has a right to that, and my sister grudges it me."

I had never heard her speak like that of Venice before. I didn't like it. Ilsa is so sincere; one knew she had been hurt by some omission on Venice's part—lack of expressed sympathy and congratulation. And of course it is Archie who has put the idea into Ilsa's head that Venice doesn't make enough of her and her great event. There is nothing like a *fiancé* for setting a girl to resent things from members of her own family that she has never thought of objecting to before, starting his beloved to worry about the little neglects and rudenesses that sisters have been offering each other ever since their nursery days, and they don't mean unkindly a bit.

And it is upsetting, all this talk of marrying that is in the air. That's War too! Eat, drink, and be merry—alter the "e" to "a"—for to-morrow we cross the Channel, where we may die, and where, at any rate, there are no women to flirt with; and if there are, we mayn't. But a girl can get along very well without thinking about such things, if other girls don't blazen their happiness under her nose.

This plethora of war marriages now, the fulsome announcements and pictures of brides in the illustrated papers, and the direct consequence—war-widows scuttling about with their long limp veils flaunting from the backs of their smart, quite unfairly becoming, hats! No wonder Venice feels left, and tries to get up a little excitement for herself. Ilsa for the moment speaks most uncharitably about her little sister, whom I am unfeignedly glad to hear *hasn't* mastered the alphabet of flirtation according to the elder. I tell Ilsa that I prefer, on the whole, that Venice should behave like a bull in a china shop, if it is a decent bull that knows no better—or worse.

She says, in the delicate art of handling men Venice's fingers are all thumbs and her eyes saucers. Well! I am glad that, having good eyes, she does not know how to use them. To see with is good enough. That she *hasn't* got the trick of *les yeux voilées*, or any other tricks, and a good thing too, seeing what it leads to, on the whole. But it is certainly a pity, as Ilsa points out, that the family pout that Aunt Corisande Wheler had, as one can see in the portraits, is growing on Venice. . . .

It is all the Master's thunder, *re* his new sister-in-law to be, that Ilsa is regaling me with. Archie, like all lovers before him and after, tells his girl that she is the best of the bunch, and so on.

I asked Ilsa if she had ever told Archie about Sir Audely Bar and the letter he had written Venice. No, she hadn't troubled to tell him. She chose to pooh-pooh the whole incident, suggesting that Venice probably wrote the letter herself!

"Why, why?" I said, astounded.

"Just to get her own way about something," Ilsa returned. "Perhaps to get you to let her be bridesmaid to Ida Leahy?"

She *was* bridesmaid to Ida Leahy, but I see no reason to connect the two incidents.

So much for Venice's attractions, which, as they didn't happen to attract Archie, are to be set down as non-existent. But it doesn't make me like him any more.

I seriously intended, as I told you, for I consider it a mother's duty, to make her tell me how much she had told or intended to tell Archie. But she has been here with me a week, and unless I ask her the question plump, and



somehow one does not like to do that, even to a daughter, I don't believe she will ever tell me of her own accord. I haven't the courage when it comes to the point. I don't know my own daughter well enough. I never did know her, I believe. I suppose it is a judgment on me for my worship of Venice. For I let Ilsa and her affairs slide from the very first; I realize it now. What could I do, given her peculiar character and inherited tendencies? She was so strong and pink and white and masterful. She simply insisted, the moment she came out, on pursuing a course of which both her father and myself disapproved. He did not take it in at the time—not even as much as I did. And the moment we talked to her seriously, she stuck out that she didn't come down on us for money or her keep, and so wasn't accountable to us for her behaviour. That if we started worrying her about it, she would go and live by herself, or with Miss Meggan Twells—the Editress of *The Beauty's Friend*.

That would have been worse. For all through, luckily, she never forfeited the shelter of her father's roof, and committed all her errors, ostensibly, under it. . . . Otherwise I doubt if she would have secured this present young man. It has saved things a good deal, the cloak of a father who was supposed to look after her—but didn't. He hadn't time.

And that, Laura, you must understand, was why I was always upset when Venice came to me and asked if she might go to college, or slumming, or to the Holy Land, or room with a girl, or an Art School! Anywhere out of the house to sleep seemed to me the thin end of the wedge! And my one idea has been to get her married before she got out of hand like her sister. After all, they are sisters and share the same wild blood in equal quantities.

And the blood itself—well, it is *sans peur* of course, but it isn't altogether *sans reproche* in the conventional sense, where our women are concerned. My own people, the Dalruans, are as respectable as God makes them, but that can hardly be said of the St. Remys.

They were wild people, those Provençal noblemen, fighting and making love all over the place, from the very beginning. There was that wicked but strong Barral des Baux, and the lady of the Cabellodourod'oro (in the Museum at Arles), and Macntz of Paradou, and the Duke of Arles' first wife, the

half-sister of the terrible Blanche la Louve of Perigueux, who had the affair with the poet Pierre Vidal and drove him into the mountains to be destroyed by the dogs of shepherds. You know it all, of course.

Later on there was Corisande Wheler, who ought, as far as appearances went, to have been canonized. . . . But I say, one never knows the obscure reason which made her choose a conventual existence for the latter half of her life. . . . And certainly she is, and remains, the only possible saint in the family !

You know, of course, how the Norssex dukedom originated ? Rather disgracefully, through Mary Knipp the actress, so often mentioned in Pepys. I do not believe, although Pepys tries hard in his memoirs to make us think it, that he was dear Aunt Minna's ancestor ! She wouldn't like that, would she ? Authors are all very well, but not so far back as that, when they were still nobodys and had to behave, more or less.

All these facts are, worse luck, incorporated in the pedigree ; they can't be kept out. And why should they ? They are picturesque, and have been revirginated by the hand and lapse of time, I should say. But one cannot, in the end, get away from facts, and the lower orders will be able to make use of it when the time comes and they want to revise the Pension List and abolish all dukedoms and emoluments that came by the right of kissing. . . . And meantime, my poor Ilsa has managed to go and inherit the riotous pleasure-seeking blood in a larger degree than some of us—that's all.

So now, as regards her self-indulgence in these sort of ways, I am, though on the best of terms with her, not in her confidence. One is just left to make what one can of such clues as have leaked out. . . .

The utter revolution in the style of dressing, the laying aside of all doubtful gew-gaws . . . these facts are significant, showing her attitude towards Archie, and his towards her, or rather her past. One doesn't know if it is voluntary, or done at his request ? She may, in certain aggravated cases, have told him how she came by the trinkets, and he may, in consequence, have specifically forbidden her to wear these again ? . . .

But, anyhow, she has made a fairly clean sweep of all, except the one Audely gave her, and to that she can proudly

point as indubitably not the wages of sin ! Or, and I think this more likely, the canny Scot has bidden her just sell them and get as good a price for them as she could !

Her pearls, of which she must have had several thousand pounds' worth, never appear now. Once when she saw my eye light upon her poor bare neck, she said, laughing, that she had put her best string into a box for safety when she went to Paris, and on her return found they had run away to water. Pearls are supposed to do that, sometimes ; it is one of the queer things about them ; but I felt sure, in this case, Ilsa was just putting me off.

I never *did* know who gave her them. She always puts an atmosphere round her, even with her own mother, that makes questions of that kind seem impertinent prying ! I might as well have asked Wanda Esterhazy who gave her the ropes she used to wear actually out shooting last year at Glen Musk, and why she did it, although I guessed pretty well at the time, being an exceedingly practical woman and a Jew banker's daughter, that it meant she didn't care to trust her valuables off her for so many hours at a stretch, and preferred to incur the reproach of being overdressed. . . .

Oh, Laura, those good old days ! Shall we ever have shoots again with Austrian princesses wearing ten thousand pounds' worth of pearls over a tweed coat, with all that hung down stuffed into the breast pocket of it, for fear they caught in something or other. She was a wonderful shot, and adored me—almost indecently so. I suppose she is hating me, poor Wanda, now ! Perhaps she is nursing now in Germany, with the pearls shoved into the breast of her apron lest they tickle her patients' noses !

Day dreams do lead one into strange byways, don't they ? How dare I think of Austrian Wanda or discuss a Hun's pearls ? She has probably had to exchange them for an Iron Cross.

To return to Ilsa. Really, though I am curious to know what arrangements she has actually made, and how much Archie has had to swallow, if any, I don't suppose I could have been of any use to her in consultation. She knows her Archie best by now, and what he is likely to be able to stand. Perhaps, since it was necessary for her to get rid of illicit gifts in order to start fair with him, he is not sorry to think that the price of them will have run into

three or four figures. A nest-egg for them to begin home life upon !

No, I don't seem to like him much, for I am in such a hurry to attribute mean motives to him. And though I felt flattered at the time by her choosing to come straight to me with her new-found happiness, I dare say her choice of me as a confidante was dictated, as far as he was concerned, by self-interest. They would have gone to his people, doubtless, if he had any available.

But his father died before he was born, and his mother takes her jointure, but lives in a Catholic convent near Hendon ; while of his sisters, one is hunting and nursing somewhere in Ireland and one is half a nun herself. We should, if they were to the fore, see exactly how the Cramont clan felt towards Ilsa, by their readiness to and the way they received her, but, so far, I have only seen their rather stiff letters of congratulation. He is a most dutiful son. He almost rose from his knees in the Quenfords' salon, Ilsa tells me, laughing herself—her sense of humour is so strong—to telegraph to his mother the news that she had accepted him. Lady Dunkeron, on her side, is perhaps a dutiful mother—give and take !

Or perhaps, huddled away from the world as the Dunkerons live, they have heard nothing of my Ilsa ? On the other hand, Catholics have ways of getting intelligence, so perhaps they have heard the whole bag of lies about my poor girl ?

But they are well broken in ; the Master is head of the house—say King of the Clan. He will have got his women drilled into submission by means of their jointures. And Ilsa is going to “vert” formally, and be received into his Church. She has always pretended she was a Catholic to us, but it wasn't serious, for she never went to Mass or Confession. This may be one of the Dunkerons' conditions of acceptance of her as a daughter.

For I am under no delusions as to her relative position and theirs, as regards ancestry. Archie's house is as good as ours ; not better, but as good. The Dunkerons have, like us, Royal blood in their veins, and it is legitimate, which ours isn't. I dare say antiquaries *are* able to claim for that old frump Lady D. that she is the mother of a titular king of Scotland—something to do with the three daughters of Balliol—or Bruce, was it ? It is a claim set

up by a good number of Scotch families—but theirs is as good as any.

Yes, the advantages, heraldically speaking, of an alliance with their House is distinctly to us. And morally—well!—that is Ilsa's fault. And I don't quite forgive her for making me have to be grateful to the Dunkerons and think ourselves lucky to tack on to their family tree.

[NOTE BY MRS. PETER QUINNEY]

My people are very odd. They ceased to send me what I call chunk letters from after the torpedoing of the *Lusitania*; and for a long while after, such letters as I did receive from them were of a purely domestic and formal character, giving me no insight into the remoter workings of their funny minds. I couldn't complain, for they *did* write, but I have been very sore about it. I now understand from a letter I received from that kind creature, Sir Audely Bar, that in common with other Britishers they were taking upon themselves to resent the so-called pusillanimity of the U.S.A. Perhaps it was natural; they did not understand. Though from the rather unimaginative attitude revealed in the letters written previously to that disaster by my mother and Venice—especially Venice—I did not apprehend that they would so fiercely take up the cudgels against us—be so “mad” with America in my poor person! For really I was astounded, all through the correspondence that preceded the actual outbreak of war, by what seemed to me to be the most disgraceful torpidity and absence of merely decent excitement in the face of such tremendous happenings. Of course I shouldn't have liked them to be nervous or frightened, but just to show that they were human, and English at a pinch. . . . Is The Last Ditch so remote from our common humanity? I asked, in my reply to Sir Audely Bar. If so, I added, I shall begin to think that the sooner they are, as a class, tidied off the earth, the better. I was almost bitter.

And then—one began to hear wonderful things of them: deeds that made one's eyes smart with pride of one's race; and Sir Audely wrote again and said that I must not be hard on fundamentally uneducated people, that they were doing their little best, . . . all that was possible. He told

me about our boys, how they mustered before they were called—simply rushed in to their feudal places in the van of England's armies. These aren't his words, quite. . . . But he did impress me with the sense that as a class they have remarkably *not* failed in their duty—or their women either as a whole. Venice has been improperly trained as a citizen. He did not put himself forward as a shining example of honourable readiness, but, as far as I can make out, he was fully over military age when he joined up. Poor Mother!

It may have been that; any way, something softened her heart to me. That and my father's death? . . . But the fact is, that she gradually, very gradually, resumed her epistolary outpourings. They both did. By the autumn, I was getting the same long rambling letters from her and Venice which amuse me so much, and touch me too. They are like children playing on the edge of one of the cracks of an earthquake!

***PART II***





## XVI

### *From The Lady Arles*

C/O LADY DOWLAIS,  
BUCKINGHAM GATE.

DEAR, I have been a shocking correspondent lately \* I know. For the last year I have not had really the heart to write the sort of long, gossiping letters I used to reel off to you. The War has entered into my soul, dear. The world outside all askew, and at home the tragedy of your father's death.

For months I have felt like a murderess. Then for my children's sake I felt it my duty to put away the thought and try to buck up. Then came the practical difficulties, money and so on, accelerated by the death of the head of the family—loss of pension and the like. I had, I found, gravely injured my children's material prospects. . . . I could curse Anatole, if he were not low in his grave! To think of all this sequence of events, the first link in the chain of which was the *Châteaubriand aux pommes* Anatole made for us at Spa and which decided me to get hold of him as cook for Venice's sake. I dare say if one came to look closer and could see more at a time, some such silly cause as that was the first link in the catastrophe of the world-war? . . .

Well, we are in it now and we have got to go through with it, for the honour, if it was nothing else, of the brave boys who have been killed. I was counting up the other day, and of the lads who were with us at Lochroyan—burnt to the ground since, and heaps of people buried under the débris, as in that poem Venice was always quoting—of all those boys more than half have gone. "Big Sir Gervaise" perished at Mons in the very beginning, and poor Zoë has

\* Note by Mrs. Peter Quinney: *Lately!*

been in a Nursing Home for ages. Philip Wyandotte married little Ellen Reveley—another one of Venice's Meinie—and is now back, blind of both eyes, and she is nursing him. He is dying. Young Freddy White, Athmare's boy, ran away from school and swore his age falsely, so as to join up; he was eventually killed in the air. As a matter of sad fact nearly all Ilsa's "boys" have come to grief one way or another: those who filled the hall with shouting and "So longs!" at Lochroyan—a doomed place, as I think it was now.

And what is really very pathetic, Ilsa doesn't miss them or their admiration any more. She is so heart and soul devoted to Archie. It was really beautiful in the beginning before he went out. The way those two loved drove Venice wild with envy, poor child! Their little flat in Pimlico is a mere pill-box, and her bedroom a garret with a skylight, but they lived in said pill-box on a herring and a half, like two turtle doves, until he had to go. He wasn't in the air long, but went to the Dardanelles on Hugh Scrymgeour's staff. And there according to the accounts she got from pals—Archie was very reticent, not to worry her—he was rounding up spies, running about among the islands on a little gunboat all day long looking for them, being potted at continually, a marked man, and having to scrape a thousand flies off every bit of meat he put into his mouth! Ilsa insisted for a long time on sitting at home alone, pining. She would hardly come to us. The flesh came off her bones, as it were, and her hips were like door handles. She used to make us feel them, because one has always chaffed her for being fat. Ilsa, thin, strikes one almost as a monstrosity.

She is doing war work now, but she won't even let us know what her job is; but at any rate it takes her away for the whole day and tires her to death, so that all she does when she gets home is to get herself a bit of supper at the kitchen table and go straight off to bed in her lonely garret.

The Lady Ilsa Dunkeron! Isn't it epigrammatic?

We have given our sons plenteously, and now we are giving our daughters!

For Venice, too, has been trying all sorts of war work; but whatever she takes up somehow fails her. She always proves not strong enough. She tried being "in the pantry," but standing tired her, and she got so sick of dirty plates that she longed to throw them at people's heads. She could

*not* stand the monotony. Besides, it was so unfair; she was stuck down in a scullery, and never saw anything that was going on. She offered to nurse, and said that though she didn't know strict nursing she would be delighted to sit up with people at night. She could have taken a book or composed poetry to keep herself awake. But they wouldn't hear of it. Nurses are most conservative, and want to keep all the important jobs for themselves. I took her away, taking care to give the impertinent creatures a piece of my mind, and then she went to a canteen at Victoria Station. But the late hours and carrying of the heavy trays broke her back; she is too tall for that sort of thing, and it was such a drag for me going every night to fetch her home. I had sooner have done the work myself. I am very "stocky." But that, too, they vetoed. They are vested interests, as I said, and hate new people. Then she accepted the offer of a secretaryship to some big man at Lake Village—I mean Buildings—but her typewriting wasn't good enough, and she doesn't, of course, know shorthand. She had got in there through favour, and I never think that does well: the other subordinates are so jealous, and wreak it on the new-comer by pretending that she is no good. Then she volunteered for an amateur farm colony at Richmond, run by Willie Wilmot—an ex-publisher and poet—and worked there for three weeks. I never could quite grasp what particular form her work took, beyond walking about the streets of East Sheen, as Ilsa said, dressed like a Principal Boy in a pantomime, in high khaki gaiters and khaki smock, and a cap with a long goosefeather stuck in it. Perhaps the feather was not in the bond and was why her services were not retained, so Ilsa, who met her by accident, says, and that she may as well give it up, and confine herself to the usual self-indulgent woman's pretence of work, giving soldiers back on leave from France a good time, which means taking the poor dears about to theatres and restaurants and motor drives and dances at night-clubs, and incidentally having a thoroughly good time yourself.

It does give her a chance of wearing evening dress, which is a great consolation to Venice, with her well-developed sense of beauty. I know that what upsets Ilsa a good deal and inspires her to make spiteful remarks, is that she hasn't had on an evening dress or shown her magnificent shoulders for over two years. If she *is* all salt-cellars, as she com-

plains, it is perhaps a good thing, but the poor girl does seem to loathe her uniform. She is so secretive that I don't know what it is like; there are so many for women; but some of Venice's were exceedingly fetching, especially the "On The Land" one. Indeed, all the outfits Venice has had, and which have had to be scrapped because of her many changes of work, would keep her in fancy dress to the end of her days; that is, if any one ever has the heart or the money to give a fancy-dress ball again!

I don't know. You aliens! A young girl I met at Lily's, an *habituée* of *Ciro's*, told me that she had never had such a good season in her life as last winter's, and had spent the whole of her allowance in dance frocks, and so on. . . .

She was American. You people don't much care! Why should you, after all? It's sport to boys, but death to the frogs, though!

However, it isn't only Americans, but what is infinitely worse: some of Our own girls, whose mothers ought to have more control over them, for the sake of England's good name. I feel it very keenly. The stories I hear! Female *Neros* fiddling while Rome is burning and slashing off the poppy-heads of respectable people's prejudices! One set—a set I have never countenanced for Venice, though the mother of one girl was my childhood's friend, *Millicent Plint*—is, man and girl, like the *Mohocks* used to be in London, as *Milton* says, "daughters of *Belial*, flown with insolence and wine." I am rather friends with the head waiter at the *Spitz*—we leave off the "bergen" now, and they have washed the two syllables off the door. *Georges* gave me a list of the wines consumed there by twelve persons the other night—three soldiers and nine young—mind you, *young* women!—that made me shudder. If *Lady Lavinia* respects nothing else she might think of her complexion! The poor *Duchess* would turn in her grave to realize what her daughter's life is. And how do they all manage to get away from their places of booze without scandal, especially in the present dearth of taxis?

My dear, I went out the other day—*Audely* was up on leave and he took *Susan Dowlais* and me and Venice to supper at *Murray's*, and he and Venice danced. Coming away in the dark we lost *Susan*, although she was clinging to *Audely's* arm like a crook-handled umbrella. We never found her again, though we heard her shrieking in the night

somewhere round Old Compton Street. Venice and I got ourselves home by Tube, Audely having to be detached in order to find Susan. He never did, although eventually she found a cab and turned up first at the house.

But to return to business. The fact remains, that even if the money pans out better than one expected, we are overhoused, and the Park Crescent House will have to be given up. Venice and I are looking for houses big enough to contain me, two maids, and Venice and Venice's friends! She says we must keep two spare rooms at least. She is used to having a girl friend always to stop with her. She talks a great deal of nonsense about the housing problem which I have to discount in her own interest, insisting that she will be quite content with a cottage in South Kensington, with ivy growing up it and a porch and a flagged walk up to the door and a fanlight over it, and a scraper and a door-knocker, and I don't know what all? But that cottage has to have two entertaining rooms and a couple of guest chambers, and I should like to see the agent's face when one begins to talk of a cottage with ten rooms or so!

I incline to one of those houses in Clareville Grove, that with a little good furniture and plenty of lace cushions one can make perfectly habitable, and that it doesn't take more than a couple of servants to keep clean, supposing the mistress of the house does her silver-table herself. Of course Venice would offer to do it at first, and has visions of herself going round in an ornamental pocket apron, dusting the china and "doing" the ferns. One knows all about that! The water spilled, and destroying the french polish of the tables, and pounds of wet earth on the floor left for some one else to take up. . . .

Effel Lucy, as we call her now, is very obliging, but practically we have lost her. Last year she and Lucy took the plunge (at their age!) and married. I gave Effel all her linen as a wedding present. And he immediately went off on national service. Her little house in Hereford Square is one of my reasons for wanting to be settled in Clareville Grove or thereabouts, for Effel is grateful, and exceedingly anxious to have us as neighbours so that she can be all the use she can. She isn't likely to have any family, that's one comfort, to make her too busy to attend to us. She knows all our ways and how we like things done and the addresses of a our shops, where they know her and would

do anything for her. If anybody can help me to keep things going, and as far as possible as nice as they used to be, it is Effel, and it is our best interest to avail ourselves of her.

My dear, no one can tell how I miss Audely! He is no good to me at all now. He is heart and soul, as well as body, in the war, by this time—soon going out! He has taken to militarism as a duck takes to water; he talks war, eats war, and sleeps war, if that were possible. It bores Venice, and I gather he and she have left off corresponding, as I believe they did a little at first when she was interested in the new things he had to tell her. Audely sends me a good letter now and then, perfectly crammed with military details and *on dits*; not broad statements, you know, about the war and its probable duration, which is really all we women at home want to know; but his own particular affairs and gossip about camp matters and intrigues that only interest the people like me that are interested in him, which Venice, of course, isn't. . . .

I really can't tell you exactly how soon, if we do get a house I have in my eye, we shall be settled. We can't get possession of it until December, so there are two months that we shall be homeless. But thank God, we have some good friends, that between them will not see us reduced to lodgings. I fancy we shall be able to make do with visits and so on till all the bargainings are concluded *re* fixtures, which people are always so stiff on, till you let time pass and beat them down by not seeming in a hurry. Then, when that is settled and the few necessary alterations are started, it will be a great convenience to have Effel round the corner, so that she can run in every now and again on her way home and out of it, to see how things are getting on, keep the workmen up to the mark, and get them out not more than a hundred years after they have thoroughly finished.

We could put in any amount of time at Susan's, or at Norssex House, or Tinsack, of course, but Susan is so grasping, and the last are so excessively *à contre cœur* for Venice! Minna and she never will get on, and I myself do find that lady needlessly aggressive and patronizing. I can tell you, Henry isn't much there; he finds it fairly impossible. She has so many schemes, and they are all tumbling over each other and overlapping all over his house. All decent

society is eliminated in London for the sake of committees and homeless refugees in the country. The Corfes are in mourning; a daughter died, too, last week. Barral Quenford would have us in Paris like a shot, but how to get there? And the Germans are rather too near Paris for comfort. We took a little run to Bedford, where Audely's regiment is stationed, and lived for a fortnight in very bad hotels. It was at Audely's expense, so it saved my purse; but the hotels—we were in all three that the place boasted—did us so badly that poor Audely's hospitality proved rather a white elephant.

I believe our best stand-by is Ida Quain. She and Gerald have lately become very well off. One of Gerald's rich literary uncles has died and left him quite a fortune. I had no idea that literature could pay to that extent? And Gerald has dropped architecture and painting and put his entire brains at the country's service. He invents air-defence things. They have taken a place on the East Coast. Shilliter Lane, I hear—so funny to call a place right on the water, a lane!—is just a bungalow made up of old coast-guards' huts, so that all the rooms open out of each other, and have little separate front doors opening right on to the beach.

These kind people suggest we make Shilliter our *piéd à terre* and pay our visits from it. That is distinctly what might be called making use of them, but they seem to want it. (I believe Ida is really fond of me. I have cut Venice out, and, poor child, she rather feels it.) Of course it would be convenient. After the furniture of Park Crescent is sold and what we want to keep stored, there is certain to be some sort of detritus left—personal belongings one wants to keep in touch with; clothes, winter and summer, that one can't lug about to other people's houses, even when they *are* relations; but the Quains say that it will not matter how much we dump on them, as they have unlimited dry sheds.

Ida is so very pressing that I am going down next week to see if Shilliter Lane is suitable. I go alone. Venice is full up of visits, and occupied, fortunately, mind and body, for some time. Private nursing suits her best; she is helping Susan Dowlais to nurse Belle-Belle, home, wounded, and not yet out of danger. They let her cheer him up after operations, and so on.

She wanted to enrol herself as Assistant Nurse in Lily

St. Just's Hospital for Officers in her new-old house at Shaftesbury in Dorset. It is run on quite a grand scale, as all Lily's things are. But that came to nothing. I didn't somehow think that Lily would be anxious to have a pretty young nurse about in her own particular Home. She enjoys it so far, so much; and as she says herself, having made such sacrifices and turned what she has grown to call her "old ancestral home" (?) quite in and out, she is surely entitled to all the fun she can get out of the less serious cases. She is as good as her word, I hear, and treats herself to what she likes. The good-looking officers, by all accounts, are kept there for ages after they are fit, if not to go back to the Front, at any rate for light duty. I don't think she quite fancies Venice's long neck bending over her patients. She herself is short, especially in the legs.

But Venice will find in the long run, Audely says, that aristocratic privileges count as nil; that there's no golden road to being of use in this war. . . . She will begin to feel left out, presently, when every one, without exception, will be doing something. Why, even Sir James Molendinar, the millionaire who was with us at Lochroyan when Arles had his stroke, is now working three days a week at one of the Red Cross places, making swabs. I think he is a darling to do it, don't you? and I have an immense respect for him. He gave Ilsa a thumping sum for a wedding present, too; it bought all the furniture.

The Zeppelin business has been getting rather bad in the North. They are great, big, unwieldy things, not easily managed; that's our salvation. Venice saw one when she was staying at Elswick with the Gobles; she said it looked just a great pink pearl, so beautiful and ethereal and serene, it seems almost a pity to shoot it down! . . . She would talk differently if they ever came to London; but there isn't much chance of that. All they have done is rather comic as yet: dissolving prayer meetings and whisking Bibles out of old ladies' hands. Still, the authorities have been issuing leaflets and bid us all be prepared. We have got our gas masks, Venice and I—Susan Dowlais insisted on it. There they are in our bedrooms, with the stuff to impregnate them with in a bottle, and some sand in a pail to throw over the flames if a bomb should come and set the hangings alight. I have my dressing-case—like Marie Antoinette's *nécessaire*,



Audely says: about as much use and as cumbrous—packed with my immediate valuables. (Our silver and best jewellery is of course in the Bank.) I left out a clock or two, and about twelve home comforts which I always say is the irreducible minimum when one is moving about. A warm coat thrown handy on a chair, and shoes if one should have to rush out at a short notice—such a paraphernalia! . . .

But I dare say, from all these advertised precautions, it is worse than we know; only one tries not to think of it. Molendinar says if the papers published all the news none of us would go to bed at all, so perhaps it is as well.

Venice positively knows not fear. She makes light of everything, mental and physical. I wonder if she has made up her mind to let nothing put her out, because she is so sure things will be as she wants them in the end. She has no temper, and that is almost aggravating. A person incapable of anger, even righteous, is difficult to live with. And so lazy, dear thing! She was very excited about the house-hunting at first, but I feel it in my bones that she *means* us to have a certain house in Edwardes Square which will be vacant later on, and just lets me drag about to agents because it amuses me and doesn't tie her, for later on she can upset all my plans if she has a mind to.

I am always in the streets now, going after these people. I made my first journey inside of a bus the other day, and had all the trouble in the world not to take the occupants into my confidence and tell them I didn't find it so bad. But I thought they might resent that, being *habitués*. They were so nice to me, offering me their seats—for of course I managed to get into a chock-full one—telling me where to get out. . . .

One does get in this way into touch with what is called the great heart of the people; and I regret to say their great coats too, which smell!

I was brought up not to think it possible, except on top, the year of illuminations, on the Accession of King Edward. Then it was great fun. Isabella Wilton and I and old Lady Dorothy used to make up parties to go down to the East End and see the sights, and incidentally that dear Father Jago. Of course one of the footmen always came to help us up and carry the cushions and rugs. It was funny to see our smart young John sitting behind us as usual, with his arms folded and a sardonic stare on his face. These

jaunts went on until Isabella's doctor forbade it, she caught such shocking colds, because she always insisted, being old fashioned, on going in full evening dress, with her chest more or less exposed.

How I do run on, remembering those days when one did disagreeable things *for fun* and suffered privation for the joke of it! For after all, you do get awful knocks *outside* an omnibus with the hard edges of the parapets, and *inside* with the brims of people's sailor hats lurching against you and tearing your veil to shreds.

Venice doesn't mind it at all. Ida introduced her to omnibuses, tops and insides, long ago, and many other queer democratic things that I disapproved of at the time, but which, as they are commonplaces now, it is as well to get indurated to, unless you want to stop in the house all the time.

I like Ida for herself, but nothing will ever make me relish some of her friends. They may be clever, but they don't begin to treat me as if I were any different from themselves. Alas, one has to stand even that now! Her mother, who I believe is to be there next week when I go, isn't exactly rude: she just looks right through one. She poses as a spiritualist, and sees visions: very dowdy ones, I should imagine, from the cast of her mind. I have seen her at lunch beckon to the maid and ask for a bit of paper to jot down a message she has just received from the Spirit World. And she leans back in an attitude of listening, somewhere up behind her head, scribbles agitatedly with one hand and the other at her ear. We all go on eating. That is what Ida likes us to do. Mrs. L. gets very good people there—I mean celebrities, of the new kind of importance that is coming to the fore. But she is breaking up. I don't think she really knows what she is saying these days, or whom she is speaking to. One tolerates it for Ida's sake and for the sake of the people one meets there, who *are* interesting, certainly, if one takes them as they are, and don't expect preferential treatment. I went to a party there—music and a famous Russian lady, a writer, Madame Something-off! that some people say is a spy. . . . One doesn't know or care: it is always interesting to meet political people. Mrs. Leahy, I verily believe, got mixed, and took *me* for the lady. I sat down, and she kept walking round and round my chair, like a guest, although she was

the hostess. Presently she said, in a low clear voice so perfectly modulated that every one near could catch it :

“ No, I don't believe you are a thoroughly bad woman ! ”

Poor Ida's trials are great, though she is proud of her mother. Well, I shall have to meet her at Shilliter Lane on Tuesday. I do really dread that even more than the position of the Quains' place—absolutely on the water line, prone under a Zeppelin attack, if there was one. But Ida has explained to me that there's no earthly reason for them to waste bombs so early in the expedition, if they do come, and that they would save them for higher game than a bungalow and a public-house and a coastguard station. That's all there is. And as Gerald says gaily : “ Nought's never in Danger ! ”

## XVII

### *From The Lady Venice St. Remy*

SHILLITER LANE.

I HAVE never been on the East Coast before, and it is so different from the South and the West that it has seemed quite a new experience. All the way down in the train some verses of Geoffrey Howard about England had been ringing in my head :

“And she is very small and very green,  
And full of little lanes all dense with flowers.” . . .

It is like a lover describing a little mistress of whom he is very fond, but hardly has a passion for. . . . It touched me, for it is of a piece with that other modified form of adoration :

“England, with all thy faults, I love thee still.”

Out of the great serious main-line train I was delivered on to the little wayside platform and passed out of the station into the motor of Gerald Quain, who drove me through just such a green lane, bordered with hedges, stuffed with flowers, grey-coated with the dust that the wheels of cars had raised from the patient roadside, lying like a crust on the soft sweet-smelling dampness within. It went on for miles, till we wound out on to a flat, heathy common, with a view of a flatter surface still, England's great sunk fence, the sea. Of an innocent blue, like a baby's eyes upturned to heaven, it lay. . . . But after what had happened just before I came down, one could not help thinking of it as merely a ditch spread between us and Cuxhaven, a ditch crossed by strange sea monsters spilling death as they came. I seemed to see, peeping over the other side, the shining tips of bayonets and the glint of helmets. The thought added for

me a tremendous spice to the drive and the escort of a pre-occupied host.

Gerald thinks of nothing but Coast Defence, and sitting there in his smart blue uniform, with the gold braid laid on the sleeve in lines like live eels playing in the water, he was, I dare say, studying revenge.

As we passed Bridgewood, he told me of what the Huns had done there: of the frantic leaps out of bed, and the child or so caught to the breast under the shawl as the mother stumbled to the comparative safety of the mud banks of the river. I could see it, and the bright brown sails of the boats at anchorage. . . .

Of course Gerald knew exactly what I had come down for.

"Oh yes, we shall give you a good time," he said. "There's sure to be a Stand-by either to-night or to-morrow."

That means the wireless through from the Admiralty to say the Zeppelins have been sighted on their way across from Schermonickenkoog, or some other place with a lovely corrugated name, and will be over here in the course of an hour, so the defence has to stand-by, and be prepared. . . .

"We've had a lively time here," Gerald said. "Two or three pitched battles already. We are getting on all right. We'll cover the whole marsh with powdered Germans and bits of gold-beaters'skin presently. That's what they are made of. I'll show you my model. . . . Oh yes," he went on repeating nervously, "they'll come to-night; it's ideal weather for them. You know, we don't pass the time of day here, we just nod to each other and say, 'Fine night for the Zepps, eh?' My barber in Bridgewood, when he takes the bib off, says cheerfully, 'See 'em to-night, sir, eh?' I'm a bit of a seer to him, getting first intelligence as I do. . . ."

He was rather jumpy, I thought, or he wouldn't have bragged like that. . . . We were passing through a sort of primeval forest that didn't interest him in his present state, but filled me with delight. Hollies and oaks, three or four hundred years old, made a dusk of daylight. Peering sideways, as we drove slow, by my request, I could see the gleam of sunset criss-crossed by the stretchings forth of lean gnarled boughs and evilly disposed trunks that had warped and bent and finally canted over and lay as they had fallen. One could imagine Rackham fairies flitting about in swarms

on the close paste of dead leaves that made the floor of the wood.

Gerald remarked scornfully that this sort of thing would never have been allowed in Germany. I retorted that the owner of this wood was perhaps a poet who didn't care to Prussianize it, and was proud of its hoary individuality. Gerald said the owner was a spendthrift, who didn't care for *any* sort of culture.

We passed the wood and the town and were down in the wide bay of green whose edges merged in the sea, and which, I suppose, before the sea retired, was not green but blue. It was even in tone for miles, except for a little blot of red on the edge, which Gerald said was his house. . . . There was a blaze of flowers at its feet which one could see a mile away. . . .

And inside it, I pictured Ida sitting, sewing in her country's service, like a mediaeval dame 'broidering banners for her lord and his retainers. My mother would be there, too, and I knew I should be made to help; and I knew, too, I would be no good. I have never learnt how to use a thimble; I just shove the needle in by the edge of the table when I have to put an absolutely necessary stitch and I am without Berrymore, as I am now. She has insisted on leaving us to do war-work, curse her! My clothes are going to rack and ruin, and Mother just has to buy me new ones, so the sooner she gets hold of another maid the better.

Mother has been so very quiet about her fellow guests that I gather there is some one else there that she doesn't like, as well as Mrs. Leahy, with whom she is at silent daggers drawn, if you know what that means. I shan't care who is there or not. It is the place that interests me. It is in the direct track of the Zeppelins crossing over from Germany, and the suggestion of imminence possessed me till the whole place—Shilliter Lane, that colony and outpost on the danger front—to my eyes assumed a doomed look. The white of the open flowers of the tobacco plant, the red of the stocks, the mauve blobs of the scabious, formed a suggestive colour scheme. They were like Union Jacks disposed all round the cottage on the landward side. On the wastes of shingle, yellow poppies blazed. The blue steely telegraph lines radiating towards the inland cliffs, miles away across the marsh, connected us, not too obviously, with civilization.

As the car drew up by the garden gate, I noticed a queer sloppy figure with brown hair, matching a brown suit, worn

by a man who didn't so much walk as loaf—he seemed somehow to be sidling round and peeling off the corners of the house, with an air of timid furtiveness. . . .

“That's Percy,” Gerald said.

“—Bysshe Shelley?” I asked politely; I was sure he was a Socialist.

“Something of the sort,” Gerald said. “How funny of you to guess it! Yes, he is our leading light, our hope for days to come! . . . Your mother doesn't quite like him. They're great fun together.”

I made up my mind to leave him to Mother.

When we got in, there was Ida, as I had predicted, in a blazing top-lighted work-room, with her mother and mine, and some one else, stitching away at brown canvas which appeared to have already made their fingers sore, the way they were all shaking their paws humorously. So I got let off sewing and Mother's embrace, too, which always worries me before people. I know it's unkind to mind, but I can't help it. Ida took me straight through two of the cottages which have been run into a good-sized dining room, to mine, which comprised a bedroom and a little lobby with a big door opening on to a microscopic garden filled with red, yellow, and blue flowers, and then a gate on to the shingle—and the sea—and Germany! I felt I was going to be happy here.

I asked Gerald, who looked in for a moment to find Ida, if they would come to-night?

“Hardly,” he replied. “We ought to have heard by now. How soon's dinner, Ida? No, nothing to-night, I'm afraid, my poor thirster after sensation!”

But I can get my sensation out of almost everything. I remembered the dining-room I had passed through, furnished like a room in a palace, with pictures and damasks, polished inlaid cabinets, Dürer engravings, and Chippendale chairs. And an old red-tiled roof—nothing more!—between it and the Foot of Destiny . . . that might be set down upon it . . . this very night! . . .

In the drawing-room where we collected, there were five officers from the station, and their beautiful dark blue uniforms went very well with my light blue Doeuillet tea-gown. Ida had on her red Futurist gown designed for her by Rowley Deane, the colour, I always tell her, of newly spilt blood.

I reminded her now. "Oh, Venice!" she said, apparently rather annoyed. It showed me that things are beginning to work on her. She never used to mind my grim humour.

We sat down to the big mirror-like oak table, that was like a brown pool with discs of napery on it. I was proud to realize that this was the home of *my* Ida, and could hardly hide a disposition to crow a little over Mother, who had made such a fuss about my being her bridesmaid in the old days. Mother, though inartistic, appreciates taste and fine old furniture, vicariously, through the eyes of others. It looked "good" as well as beautiful. The polished oak of the cabinets reflected the gleam of the candles and the sharp spear-like glints of light falling athwart glass. Behind the glass doors of the cabinets more glass shone mysteriously, its radiance dissipated in rich gloom. Two great china Mangtze bowls held yellow, red, and blue war flowers out of the garden. It was a beautiful scene. The wavy gold on the men's cuffs twinkled as glasses were raised, full of golden and purple wine. . . . Gerald and Ida have left off being teetotalers; the times are stiff, and need stiff drinks for men who are to bear no one knows what, so Gerald, who is no obstinate fool, says. The change in these people's outlook, more than anything else, makes me feel the tremendous significance and imminence of the time. . . . For here we are; these men who are dining and being very gay with us will spend the night, mostly standing up, out of doors, cold, exposed, and perhaps shot at. While for us inside, sitting so smug in the pretty room, surrounded with all the trappings of civilization—well, it was on the cards that we might, in one moment, be abolished off the face of the earth, pashed to atoms like the kings and princes in the *Vision of Piers Plowman*. It was not particularly likely, you understand, but one half liked, half dreaded to think of it. After dinner one of the officers sang—very badly, but he couldn't spoil it—*Nuit d'amour*, and then, having done their duty by the women, the men, one after another, slunk out and went about their business.

We five women—there was an inconsiderable Miss Taylor there—were left alone in the stifling atmosphere: the thick curtains were drawn, remorselessly close, by decree. Ida



played her harpsichord—wonderful Ida, she can do everything now! The tenuous sounds, sweet even to pain, like taps on the tenderest, most responsive of drums, hardly reached, no more than did the lights, turned down to pin-points, as far as the corners of the room and the belt of woollen folds that circumscribed it. . . . It was all ghostly, unreal, even as the danger we were supposed to be affronting. . . .

The men did not return. They had promised to let us know if a warning came through. The sentry on his beat along the sea path between us and the beach passed and re-passed. We looked to see the heavy red brocade portière, which he could part with his hands without stopping, pushed aside. . . . That would mean that the business of the night had begun. . . .

About half-past nine there did come a knock at the door. It was one of the coastguard men come to report a slight wound incurred in the exercise of his duty the day before, which Ida had dressed. Ida was very flushed. Mother would have it that it was the heat, but I think Ida is very sensitive—her playing of Purcell made me see that—and the delicate intelligence that can interpret that sort of music is bound to feel this sort of thing keenly. . . .

Then the chauffeur, back from Bridgewood eight miles away, came round to relate the perils through which he had passed. The sentries all along the road were as jumpy as could be, and had tried to bayonet him because he was slow in giving the word. . . . He needed the cockles of his heart warming in the usual way. Ida did it. When he had gone the desolate thump of the sentry's feet in their crescendo and diminuendo came again. . . . Ida gave way a little. . . .

"What I hate is the steps that go *past*!" she exclaimed fretfully. We begged her to play some more, but she refused, saying that she didn't suppose she would ever play again until the war was over.

"This time next year then," the brown man said. "The People won't stand it longer than that."

I forgot to say that he was with us, having nothing to do with the air defences. One hardly counts a man nowadays who stays with the women; he might as well have produced his knitting or a spinning-wheel. But he looked nicer in evening dress, and his eyes are extraordinarily bright.

It is almost bad form to have them so bright. Though he is supposed to be a Socialist, Mrs. Leahy doesn't like him, and is always sparring with him about elementary philosophy. One forgives his want of manners, or rather manner—he has too many manners. I rather like his urgent, boyish way of talking, as if every question he discussed must be settled there and then. And his brown eyes do match his hair, and they flash; not about anything that matters: he is only interested in politics. I have tried him with poetry. He looks at me when I talk of Futurism and *Imagistes* as if I were a brand to be plucked from the burning—title and all! . . . Why isn't he in the army? I can't even make out how old he is?

We had all got very slack about talking; it was half-past ten. Mrs. Leahy, like a large tired child, was falling off her high chair—she always will have one it seems, for some spiritual reason or other—with sleep. Only Mother kept the flag flying, partly because of me, and what she realized was my evident disappointment.

Just as I was meditating an unselfish act—viz. a move, the curtain was pushed aside and Gerald came in. He went to the fireplace and stretched his legs.

“Better all go to bed!” he said. “Nothing doing to-night. We must have had a warning before this. The beggars are giving us a rest, and themselves too. Time for them to sweep up the bolts and rivets that are lying about the floors of their darned machines, like beetles when the housemaid comes down in the morning. Go to bed, girls, do.”

I was disappointed and showed it. Mr. Gregson asked abruptly, “Where is your room?”

I told him it was at the end of the bungalow nearest the coastguard station, and he said kindly that that would be all right for me if they did come, for Quain would have to be awakened, and generally, the officers hurrying to the gun, were in such a hurry that they just banged at any window of the bungalow as they passed. It had happened so on one other occasion when there had been an alarm after half-past eleven and he had been sleeping in that room. Nice man! I gave him a sleepy smile as he handed me my candle and escorted me along the narrow passage connecting the whole length of the dining-room and linen room. . . . Then Mrs. Leahy, in a wonderful Chinese dressing-gown,

with her grey hair done like a pagoda, for sleep, came ramb-ling along to me, after all the noises of the house were still.

"You aren't afraid, are you?" she said, "sleeping so far away from us all?"

I answered her quite truthfully. No. She looked as if she didn't believe me, and raked up a time-honoured quotation for my benefit, "that we were as near God by sea or by land"; adding so as to keep up her flag of unbelief: "near the Eternal Principle, I should say."

Both she and Mr. Percy Gregson are waging war to the death on all those traditional emotional shibboleths—as they call them—that served our forefathers so well.

God is surely a much better figure-head—a stronger-seeming mast to nail your flag to than a vague First Cause or pedantic Eternal Principle! If I have got to support with my intelligence, cozened or dragooned, a Great Figure of some sort, why should not it approximate to one's father, who ought to be, if he isn't, the kindest person one remembers? Mine was. And he had the beard, too. Yes, I believe I have a leaning to ancestor worship. I confess that I do sometimes say a prayer, quite humbly, to the beautiful half-savage, half-pathetic personage whom my forefathers fought and went to the stake for! You may say what you like, but there really is a spice of devilry about the mandate carried out so ruthlessly by Elijah—rather a savage, too—on the poor priests of Baal! It used to delight me as a child to hear it read out in Beardmore Old Church. I was all breathless attention, and they didn't believe I was even listening, or perhaps they would have been shocked at such strong meat for babes? And "Abraman Isaac"! I didn't like that spirit in God at all!

Listening to these people, Mrs. Leahy for one and Mr. Percy Gregson for another, I get to feel as if I had been eating sawdust in a jerry-built building, sitting on American bentwood furniture. A Cosmogony without a God in it is like a world without sunsets.

As soon as Mrs. Leahy went I opened the door of the cottage and, closing it behind me, stood in the tiny garden—as big as a pocket-handkerchief—whose one border I could distinguish by the closed white eyes of the tobacco plants. . . . I looked over the gate, towards the expanse of shingle. . . . It was all ups and downs, like craters and hillocks of sand. The sea and the sky were merged together in a dull, blue,

moonless quiet, spreading away across to the alien lager, Cuxhaven or Kiel, or whatever port it is. . . . The watery exercising ground was free to the enemy as well as to us ! . . . Would the bolt be shot to-night ?

I hoped against hope. I had been told it would not, and perhaps not even the next night, and I should go back to town on Monday and see nothing. I was awfully disappointed. I suppose I had got the Zeppelin fever rather badly. My feeling was not unlike Goethe's at the cannonade of Valmy, which he described dispassionately as poet and citizen of the world. I quivered, as a cat's whole body trembles when she first envisages her prey. My prey was a strong emotion of a peculiar kind, and yet I wasn't going to attain it !

"Lighten our darkness ! . . ." I did not have the meanness to proffer that time-honoured prayer, but I tried to console myself with the reflection of the babies that would be spared if I missed my sensation. . . .

I was awakened suddenly. A tap at my window and the rough voice of an A.A.C. :

"We've had a warning. Tell Quain, will you ?"

It has come. There was, after all, to be a Stand-by that night. I must get up, strike a match, light a candle, and run along the whole line of cottages to tell Gerald.

I didn't wait to light that candle or put on a dressing-gown or shoes or anything, though there was, of course, plenty of time—they would not be here for half an hour or more perhaps—but I raced barefoot along the passage and shouted my message. In a second the narrow gangway was alive, we were all jostling each other ; but that was only because the space between the walls was narrow, the people who filled it were quite calm. Gerald, in pyjamas, could be seen rummaging for clothes in one lighted doorway with Ida shouldering into her kimono ; Mrs. Leahy at another appeared, pagoda hair and Chinese dress and all : she had never been to bed, for the spirits had been speaking. A maid was busily engaged in finding Gerald his revolver, which he thought he had left in the drawing-room loaded. Percy Gregson, in a wonderful dressing-gown and the most wonderful shock of hair, helped her. He went out with them just so, dressing-gown and all. I shouldn't suppose they would let him go near the gun for fear of frightening it !

In ten minutes there wasn't a man in the house, and Ida and the maid and I were laying supper for the hungry men, who would come in about four o'clock when their vigil, or perhaps their spell of active service, was over and eat.

It was half-past twelve.

Pieces of information began to leak down. "They" were at Brottingley, Ida said, laying a knife and fork carefully in its place. "About three miles south of this. We aren't on the way to London. They most likely won't come over us. I'd go back to bed, if I were you, Venice. You'll be certain to hear Them if They do come. It's not a noise you can miss. Fearfully loud and horrible—the beat of the engines. . . ."

She tried to describe what it was like.

"Imagine a motor-bicycle and the 'blop-blop' ten times louder, and going on as if it were muffled under water so that the blops mix and run on—all the reports merged into each other! That's the nearest I can do for a description. It's a coarse, strident, vulgar noise, like the cruelty it brings with it. . . . You don't know, and though you will be disappointed if you don't, I almost hope you never will know, what it is to be under a Zeppelin and helpless as we all are. . . ."

Ida's eyes were dilated. . . . She has evidently got Them on her nerves considerably, and she is always more excitable when her mother is there. I think she is rather afraid of the good lady's going right out of her mind under strain. . . . Mrs. Leahy began, now, to explain the Zeppelin agony to us in her own painfully, popular-novelettish way.

"We are like animals ramping along the ground during a thunderstorm. It is the crystallized malevolence of the world. The father and mother of a Zeppelin are unspoken curses!" . . .

Ida said, pausing as she covered up the beef with a napkin: "It's the feeling of impotent hate which it awakens in one which is so dreadful. I declare, that if a Zeppelin came over us now"—we all looked up!—"and a German fell out of it unhurt—which, thank God, isn't likely—I should just snatch this knife off the table and kill him."

"Would you," asked Miss Taylor, who had obviously been reading Kipling, "even if his back was broken, and he only asked for a drink of water to ease his parched throat and to die easy on?"

Ida answered savagely, Yes she would—let him die as parched as a bone, thinking of the good beer of the Fatherland. I don't know what is going to become of my sensible Ida if she lets things ride her like this ?

"But, Ida," I said, quite gently, "how would you feel about, say, an honest German—Bavarian—soldier who had landed here openly from a flat-bottomed boat, taking the risk, having a fair fight for it ? An attempted invasion on an enemy shore is a perfectly legitimate act of warfare. That would be what you call cricket, wouldn't it ?"

"I dare say," Ida answered sourly. She is just, when you put a case before her. "I suppose I should have to leave him to the men to deal with, and perhaps even bind up his wounds after he had been vanquished. But this air business is simply the meanest method of warfare ever conceived, and you will feel exactly as I do after you have really been through it once and heard that awful noise over your head and realize that your men are helpless, however brave and handy they are. It discounts bravery, don't you see ? . . . Oh, I am sick and tired !"

She put her head in her hands over the table for a moment.

"There was a little child I saw at Bridgewood," she said. "You couldn't have borne to see it—you, Venice, would have turned away your eyes. You clever people always do if the experience is too painful. You give out at once. And this was——" She shuddered.

We made her tell us how it was. The baby she saw had only been born two hours, and its mother had died of her wounds after giving birth to it.

I think it is no use deluding oneself and mistaking one's values, even over a dead baby. I said that I thought we made altogether too much of the innocent civilian business. There are, as a matter of fact, no innocent civilians left in England, except perhaps me and Mother, more shame for us ! Even Ilsa, doing war work, isn't a civilian. That Bridgewood child's father and brothers were no doubt fighting : we need not take them in to account. But the baby's mother, probably up to the very hour of its birth, was making swabs or knitting comforters—doing something to help the people at the front—while it's grown-up sisters, if it had any, were making munitions, and so on.

This constitutes them all combatants and fair game to the

Germans. Even the baby itself, that wasn't born at the time its mother was injured, was a combatant too.

Ida simply screamed ; she is fearfully overwrought :

“Well, of all the cold-blooded things I ever heard!” and left the room. They didn't any of them like me much for what I had said, though, indeed, I was only putting the case to them honestly and fairly, stripped of sentiment. . . . Just as I have stated it to you.

It was horrid, being out of sympathy with them all for the rest of the evening, and I went early to bed as they suggested, counting on being aroused if the Zeppelins did come over the house.

As Mother will tell you—she was awfully sorry for me—they did come over, and I was allowed to sleep through it. As a punishment, I suppose ?

I send you my notes on as much as I was permitted to see, hoping that it will interest you.

## XVIII

### *From The Lady Arles*

SHILLITER LANE.

I HAVE been in this charming place for over a fortnight. Ida is so kind. And there seemed to be such tremendous possibilities of amusement here that I wrote off and persuaded Venice to chuck Lily St. Just and her lively friends, and come down here if only for a week-end, to see what she could see and incidentally something of her mother. And although we did have a Zepp show, so to speak, on purpose for her, the poor child was so unlucky as to miss it. They were actually over the house last night, or what looked like it, but gave us no attention—reserving their bombs for more noble quarry.

Venice, tired out with the London racket I suppose, slept profoundly through it all. I myself am bored to death with the Zeppelin stunt, but that makes it more ironic that poor Venice, eager to experience the sensation for the first time, should starve in the midst of plenty.

The evening she arrived she was tremendously excited. She had heard such glowing accounts from me and Gerald. I think Gerald rather "stuffed" her, but as a matter of fact last week it was frightful, and several people were killed at Bridgewood nine miles away. One monster dropped its cistern, or boiler—something essential—and it was all riddled with holes, which shows our shots do reach them. And one idiot of a Hun seems to have lost his cap—in his excitement, I suppose, leaning over the side to drop his bomb—and an old man, whose wife was killed, picked it up and was more or less consoled, for he gained great prominence. The poor things rushed out of their houses with their babies and gramophones—they always try to save them—and plunged into the swampy mud-banks, and got drowned that way, too. There is a police cordon round Bridgewood ever



since last week, or we could have motored Venice to see the wrecked houses.

And that first night, after Venice had gone disappointed to bed, because they hardly ever get a warning to stand by from the Admiralty after half-past eleven or so, one came. Venice's room, being nearest to the telephone station, the officer charged to warn Gerald tapped at her window.

She was perfectly equal to the occasion; got out of bed and raced off to the other end of the bungalow in the dark, without waiting even to light a candle or put on slippers. She banged her cheek against a door and bruised it, but she made no fuss at all, I am proud to say, and I don't think it will mark.

The wretched things had crossed the coast at Brottingley, three miles off, and we are in a fairly direct line for London. Still, they might never come our way? . . . It is often a miss like that, but as usual Ida prepared. After Gerald had found his revolver—it took all the maids in the house to do so; men are all alike—and got fairly off, we women, left behind, prepared and laid the table for supper. After a Stand-by, whether the Zepps have given them trouble or not, they are always as hungry as hunters, exhausted with standing by out there in the cold for so many hours.

Venice was all there and of the greatest use, Ida said. But her eyes were big with sleep, and if it had not been for the excitement I don't believe she could have stood up at all. We persuaded her to go back to bed when all was ready, and lie down until they were actually sighted overhead. Mrs. Leahy was rather helpful, persuading Venice that even if she fell asleep and we forgot to waken her she could not possibly sleep through it. Venice believed *her*—girls never trust their own mothers—and I had only heard them once, while Mrs. Leahy has been here through all, and was at Hartlepool too.

Venice did sleep through it. And she would never forgive me if she knew that it was my fault they didn't throw cold water over her to wake her. I have had to say that I slept through it, too, and that no one else remembered her in the excitement. As a matter of fact, I did go to her room with intent to rouse her, but when I saw her unconscious, looking like a pure marble image with its mouth open, through all the frightful racket, I simply had not the heart to recall her to this world of noise and crime.

Once we had got the men off there was no excitement. There never is. When they came back at three in the morning, without having got in a single shot at a Zepp, I was not there. I had fallen asleep again, and Ida and her mother and Miss Taylor warmed up the hot soup and looked after them. Venice missed that too, which seems to have finished up-setting her. She never can bear losing any experience; and, as she said, she had helped to lay that cloth and cut her thumb opening tins, so what with her bruised cheek and damaged thumb I've no doubt she felt she had done her bit and was entitled to preside over that supper like a virgin martyr, with her hand done up in rags and a plaster on her cheek. . . .

Mr. Gregson has been out with them too, I hear: the only one not in uniform. I must say I rather wonder why he isn't doing *something*, and rather dread definitely knowing that he is what they call a Conscientious Objector, a horrid sect that is growing up lately.

No, I can't think that of him. Perhaps he has a weak heart? I like him, as far as one can like any one so utterly out of one's own class and ways of thinking. Poor dear, he simply doesn't know half the things he ought to have in him without knowing. He is very clever and sharp, and just behaves by it and the light of reason, and that's fatal—in crucial moments, when one can't think or judge, and behaviour has got to be a matter of blind instinct.

I had a long conversation after the raid this morning with Gerald, who got up to breakfast, in spite of his night afoot, spruce, bathed, and fresh. Ida has really done wonders with him. Not that Mr. Gregson isn't perfectly clean. He is; he looks it, if one can get beyond his badly groomed hair. But it is the sad thing about people of his persuasion, that one can't manage to get the correlated idea of frownsness out of one's mind.

I was praising him to Gerald, and I finished by saying with a sigh, for I do like him: "Of course he isn't a gentleman; he never can be that."

Gerald took me up. "I dare say not. So few people are nowadays—the people that matter. He hasn't time to grouse over it, any way. He has better dreams."

"What's better than being a gentleman, to begin with?" I said. "It is simply the foundation of everything."

"Well," Gerald said, "he'll manage to be Prime

Minister without any foundation of that sort, one day, if I'm not mistaken. He's unmarried. We must try and secure him for our Venice."

I did not resent this from Gerald, for I know he is very fond of Venice, and is only thinking of her ultimate welfare in these troublous times. Things change so. What was an impertinence three or four years ago is merely a piece of shrewd far-sightedness nowadays. But when Gerald sought to interest me in the creature, to discuss the points of his rather repulsive personality, I confess I jibbed, and would have shut Gerald up if he hadn't been my host and Mr. Gregson a fellow guest. *Autres temps, autres mœurs*. And after all, I have only to remove my daughter from the pernicious contact if I feel it to be so. So I let Gerald go on dilating about the man, whom he really seems to be very keen on. He is *sui generis*, which, as I understand, means that he is a law unto himself. An eager, passionate, vital creature full of rampant promise—those were Gerald's exact words.

"He's in love with life, and not afraid of death. He did quite a sporting thing last night, before we noticed him near the gun—in his preposterous dressing-gown!" Gerald laughed. When I asked him what, he said I'd never understand. Something about a tap or valve which he rushed up to and turned off because it was fizzling, under the impression that it might explode and cost him his life.

"You understand, Mother" (he often calls me Mother and I like it, he is so handsome), "the thing didn't matter a damn, but it was all the same as far as pluck goes, and Venice shall hear of it."

I admitted that Mr. Gregson might be brave, and *was* apparently, but there seemed to me a touch of impertinence, something almost disgusting, in a man like that venturing to be passionate!

I can't say why. . . . I feel it like that.

When we went in to breakfast we found that there were no letters or papers, and one of the officers came and told us that the telephone was disconnected. It all pointed to trouble in town. Perhaps the Zepps had got there, and in that case they might have put a cordon round London and people have to walk, say, from Stratford or Bow. Gerald strongly advised Venice to profit by the escort of Mr. Gregson, and go up in good time. She was not loath; she hoped to

see something in town as she had been denied it here. So I had the pleasure of seeing my daughter tucked into a car with a Socialist who wore a soft cap and long hair curling out from underneath its brim. Times change! I could do nothing. And of course he'll take good care of her. This is at least in the bond. . . . Una and the Lion! And that's flattering him.

We were all very flat afterwards. I agreed to go down and bathe with Mrs. Leahy, who rather amuses me. I haven't bathed in the sea since I was a girl, but she is older than I, and I wasn't going to be beaten by a Shaker or Theosophist, or whatever she is—she changes her views so. I had no bathing dress with me, so I had to borrow one of Gerald's pink, half-silk, half-wool pyjamas which had shrunk, and was therefore fairly near my size, and a sash of Venice's.

It was a wonderful morning. Like the sun rising on a battlefield, deadly quiet after the racket of the fight. There wasn't a bit of lift in the air, and a faint white mist lying along the ground and the sea, not enough to keep the glow of the sun out altogether. One had a queer feeling of hot smother and imprisonedness—because one could not tell what might not be going on beyond the veil. One heard stupid noises—an occasional fog-horn, woolly in the heaviness, like the grunt of a big creature penned up somewhere; or a sailor's cry, muffled, from some boat on the beach we could not see. . . . Anybody could have landed. . . . After we had come out of the water and the mist had cleared away a little, I could distinguish a fussy little seaplane ploughing backwards and forwards along the coast. . . . And twice a sullen detonation that was surely a gun?

I remarked upon it to Mrs. Leahy, looking like an Arab slave driver in white linen, spreading herself and drying herself beside me in the sun, that had now burst out.

"No, not a gun," she said. "More like a mine."

"One of ours, eh?"

The annoying creature shrugged her shoulders. She has been at Shilliter Lane all the summer and is more up to the common objects and sounds of the seashore than I.

"Who knows?" she said rudely.

"Oh, well, I shall see it all in the papers," I countered her. "If there has really been anything serious in the way of an explosion—a vessel blown up, or so on?"

"Indeed you will not. No one but the Government will

ever know what goes on out there." She pointed to the blue horizon. "Even we here know more than the papers from which you get all your knowledge." She preened herself. "It's no use keeping *us* ignorant, you see. For we are in it, of it, fighting, standing-by all the time. Not even in the daytime do we have any respite from Murder and reprisal for Murder. But we will repay!"

She pointed in the direction of, I suppose, Kiel or Cuxhaven.

I was so cross with her for identifying herself with the Government in such an absurd, impudent way that walking home across the sand hillocks, with the loose sand silting up into one's shoes, and blowing against one's poor bare shins—Gerald's trousers are rather short for me, and tight—I attempted, notwithstanding my discomfort, to instil some ideas into her head. I said that the people in the more martyred parts were not excited about it; that in Bridgewood, for instance, they were making capital out of their woes, treasuring up relics to give themselves consequence, even if they *had* lost a child or an eye. The day after the bombing you couldn't, Gerald told me, get along the West Road in a car; it was worse than herds of sheep. Everybody for miles round had turned out to see the scene of the raid. Donkey carts crammed with women, and perambulators filled with the babies that the ferocious Germans had spared and that they durst not leave at home. . . .

And when we got in I showed her a letter I had received from one of the Darcie girls—the one that married a Provençal, you know, and is as happy, still, as the day is long in that nice lazy country. They take everything so easily there, even the war, that is eating away their life. Betty Jauzé's hard North-country nature cries out about it. She was the eldest, and has been married long enough for her English to have got Frenchified. This was the bit:

"This place is simply lovely now, and so peaceful. The only thing one would complain of is the want of sympathy for those that are less lucky and suffer from the war and its horrors. Here life is happy-go-lucky as usual, and sometimes I could wish for a Taube to come and enliven the people, and make them a little realize the sorrows of their fellow-creatures. . . ."

Mrs. Leahy was impressed, but said that this didn't prove anything except that what the eye didn't see the heart

didn't sorrow over, and that in the West of England, where she had been lately, she had often found herself echoing the same wish. . . . She thought Avignon and Cardiff needed reminding as well as Mannheim and Frankfort—People were all selfish pigs together!

I said she must be Pro-German, and that stopped her mouth.

## XIX

### *From The Lady Venice St. Remy*

c/o THE LADY ST. JUST.  
THE SCHACK, CAMPDEN HILL.

I MISSED the raid at Shilliter Lane that I had gone down on purpose to see, but caught it up in town. The Zeppelins that crossed over us the night before, had followed the railway line all the way to London and chawed up the station a good deal. We steamed in slowly; part of the line was under water. A bomb had fallen on the water-main. That was all I saw. Of course the moment we got out of the station everything seemed all right; the police had drawn cordons round everything there was to see, as usual. We knew some houses were burning, for one whole street was closed. There was an air of suppressed news about everybody; even the porters, who knew nothing, looked frightfully portentous.

This was the event; the sweets of anticipation I had enjoyed down at Shilliter Lane were far more moving. I had gone right up to the top notch, letting go when the missile was loosed, as it were, and getting all the best of it.

We left Liverpool Street at three o'clock and it took us nearly two hours to drive to the Mansion House. Not because of the damage and the fires, the way was clear enough, except for the crowds of people out to see what they could, and that was nothing. Never mind, they took it as a holiday: walked about on the pavement as people do on the Paris Boulevards, each man with his woman, or two women. It was a wonderfully fine afternoon.

To me this justifies the sickening appeals on the hoardings to "Come In?" "It's your duty, my boy——" and the grey-haired mother "shocing" her son out of the house as if he was a stray cat, which has taken the place of "Buy your boy a box of tools!" It made me rather wild. All our men

with hardly a single exception have gone, and these "smug cits," as Bertie Corfe calls them, are hanging back and loafing about to see what the Hun has done and that *they* aren't trying to stop. They all seem tolerably healthy specimens; much stronger than poor Bertie, who can hardly walk for varicose veins. Neither can they pretend that they are occupied in useful trades, for whoever heard of a worker, even a City clerk, having time to sun himself on the pavements between the hours of three and four on a day in the middle of the week?

My companion was amused at what he called my strenuous way of looking at it. When I said that I would not speak to any one of our men who, being fit and healthy, hesitated to take up his feudal obligation, he carelessly agreed with me, saying that it is quite in order that we aristocrats should work off the bill for the emoluments we have had during a thousand years. These other people had been stunted and maimed and forced to use up their manhood in providing luxuries for me and my like, and they were now, he contended, doing quite enough for the civilization that had exploited them. He added that they would go all right when the country sent for them; let the Corfes and Scrymgeours and Darcies and Norssexes get taken off first, at all events. Then Labour would see! . . .

I dropped Mr. Gregson at his own request at the door of the National Liberal Club. It was my cab, not his; that is the new way of it. Perhaps he considers this little civility represents a way of working off my feudal obligation?

I got out to Lily's, the dear little villa she has taken—and renamed shockingly—on Campden Hill, while Bensley is a hospital—by tea-time, and found her sitting in a darkened room, all the blinds down in the beautiful sunset, paralysed with fear and remembrance. She had been out in the raid.

She is a bit of a craven. I am glad she is really not one of us. Though she owes her position to my Cousin Horace, all her money comes from some man before him. Lily—I have seen it long ago—is one of those gross, insensitive women who go in for a good whack of immoral living and then settle down, marrying a penniless peer for love, as he marries her for money. Horace is a thoroughly bad hat, and doesn't really live with her.

That is Lily's history, which they think I don't know. I didn't. I knew nothing much a year ago. I have grown



up, which they said I should never do. What a child I was in the days of The Meinie at Lochroyan and the arrest of Anatole! . . . I realized nothing. My letters then must strike you as absurd.

I made her light up and give me some tea and tell me about it all. I began by saying that the Zeppelins had been over us at Shilliter Lane last night, and that I had not even been disturbed, but had slept through it all. Of course, as I knew before I spoke, she would not believe it; people never will believe the truth. . . . And I did not believe *her* story either, though I give it you for what it is worth.

She had allowed Bertie Corfe, home on leave, to persuade her to go to a lecture with him, over at Finsbury Circus, the very hottest place. Something about Oriental Research, in which Bertie is, strangely enough, interested, and she is interested in Bertie Corfe.

They had just got out of the lecture hall, and Lily was just drawing her expensive ermine wrap over her splendid *décolletage*, when there was an alarm and she and Bertie dashed down and into an underground place under the very middle of the Circus. I could not help laughing at the frightful grotesqueness of it, and she was very angry. But didn't even the Empress Theodora hide her lover in the bathroom? . . .

There was a man down there, a custodian, who must have been deaf, for he was perfectly calm, doing some job with a mop and a pail while the bombs were thundering down on the glass roof, which they generally have in those places. Then, when all was quiet again, the three ventured up and saw a bus that had been struck all to pieces, and two dead horses and a conductor and five pairs of arms and legs in boots lying about at some distance from each other. These are Lily's figures. The man was quite dazed and merely said, quietly, looking round: "Well, I think I'll be getting home now."

Poor devil! He lived at Clapham. If it was only one leg instead of five pairs, I said, it was enough to drive him mad.

Then, she says, Bertie sighted a young policeman standing near and shouted to him to get them a cab. He did not move, so they went up to him and Lily touched his arm, which was quite stiff and cold. . . . Neither did he turn his head or take any notice when they spoke to him. . . .

Presently he did unfreeze and bestir himself; but what could he do for them?

They had to walk most of the way home. Lily's car had of course bolted long since.

The Greek maid, who is still with Lily, told me that there wasn't much white left about Lily's priceless ermine cloak when she got it back, and that there was even a spot of blood on it. The tactful Effrosyne has not told Lily that. She tried to get it out with salts before Lily saw. Effrosyne hadn't heard a sound, but was sleeping soundly when the bell pealed at three in the morning and Bertie Corfe assisted a fainting Lily into the house and laid down himself on the drawing-room sofa till morning. Lily's nerve is quite destroyed. She says she is sure that They will come to-night, and every night, now, and that she is going to sleep under the kitchen table with Marfise and Blucher—the new bulldog Bertie has given her—with all the lace pillows and silk cushions the house can muster on top of it, and never means to leave the house again until the war stops.

I reminded her that she had given my mother a solemn promise that she would go out with me, chaperon me, etc., and how about that? She said she didn't care, that she had to take care of herself, but she will be glad if I will stay with her. Why can't I resolve to spend a nice quiet winter and get up my looks by going to bed early and not being out after sundown? But she simply must refuse to stir out in the evenings—and I can go out by myself in the daytime. . . .

I saw that the moment had come for a *coup d'état*.

I said I *would* stop with her, if she would take me on my own terms. (I know she wants me badly. She is awfully alone, and Horace is never there.) But that I was young and could not think of losing sight of all my friends, which her plan for me would entail. On the other hand, Mother must not be worried, or let loose on Lily, for that I know is what she is more afraid of than anything else in the world. So an arrangement must be come to. I absolved her forthwith from all the duties of chaperonage, and she must give me a latchkey.

That was rather the crux. I had had my eye on a latchkey for a long time. It is insensate that I should not have one. Lily fought it. She said that there wasn't such a thing in the house, that she didn't know where it was, and that Effrosyne had got it.

I said I would account for Effrosyne and any objections she might take. And that I would, as I said, go on living with her on those terms and on no other.

We had in Effrosyne, who produced a latchkey—"The Schack" is an oldish house—as large as the key of Kenilworth Castle which used to lie on our hall table at Beardmore. I said that we must have a new Chubb lock fixed at once, and that Effrosyne could have a duplicate.

It was further arranged that Effrosyne should nominally sit up for me, so as to soothe Lily's scruples and Mother's; but we shall soon get over that between us, the Greek devil and I.

I knew I should love letting myself in at night, alone, finding a still, dark house; no light, except the great yellow eyes of Lily's Persian cat blinking at me. Rah won't sleep under the kitchen table with her. And I have always thought that it was nonsense, a maid's sitting up for one. If one gets back to the house at all, then there is nothing for her to do. I suppose the idea is that she will raise the house if one doesn't come back, but one always does come back, of course.

And another point strikes me: if there is a footman and he keeps the maid company, why doesn't she want chaperoning? Even Mr. Gregson says the way people leave a pretty maid in an empty house as caretaker where they have men in painting and plastering, is disgraceful. . . .

I told Lily I would always take a taxi or get some one to see me home, but that *I do not mean to do*, on any account.

Men, the nicest of them, do turn such beasts, sometimes, the moment they are between the four walls of a cab with you. There are so very few men I would trust to keep my respect in those circumstances, and I am not going to risk it, especially with Mr. Gregson, with whom I may be going out a good deal, as he has offered to show me some aspects of life in this great city with which I am, so far, unacquainted. I should hate to have that kind of *démêlé* with him, for not being quite a gentleman he might fall—succumb to barbarism. I am not going to give him the chance; he is too useful to lose. . . .

I have settled it with him and others. I am never to be seen home even if there are fifty raids at once.

The plan works beautifully. When it doesn't rain I walk

all the way, or if it is too far—for instance, if I am dining in Piccadilly—I take the Tube, and then walk up the hill. It has come to be the *bonne-bouche* of the whole evening to me.

I think of what I am going to do while I am still moving in the realms of light and song (comparatively speaking). For now there is so little light. The portals of places of amusement do keep up some slight pretence of it, but they are closing, more and more of them every day. And between these oases there are lapses into black barbarism . . . great caves of darkness where no picture-palace or restaurant or music-hall lets light stream forth. In Oxford Street, where the high houses shut off even the faint glare, there are wide patches of indescribable gloom, as if there had been a bombardment. . . .

And on my hill there are no arc-lights, no picture-palace doors to glare! Quite early in the afternoon even, if I am out anywhere and not returning before dark, I can dream in anticipation of the soft-featured gloom that will have descended on my home like a layer of delicate dust. In theatres, in restaurants among the tinkle and subdued glitter, I gloat over the thought of it lying out there, placid, beyond the radius of careering buses and cabs, my hill of mysteries. . . .

At the Café Royal the other night a man leaned over the noisy, beer-stained table, looked into my eyes, and said:

“A penny for your thoughts, Lady Venice!”

I gave him an evasive answer. I was thinking of my tame suburban home now lying prone under enchantment. . . .

And at the Cinderella-hour, I bid good-bye to my gay companions at the porch of some Tube or Underground, and look to come up again in another country, full of surprises and dangers. Somewhere on the hill there is a charcoal burner's hut that we used to read about in Grimm's Tales; there is the garden of the twelve lilies; there is the old Witch Wife (Lily St. J.) sitting with red eyes in her chair by the fire. . . .

I suppose it is the sense of danger created by the fact that we are at war which breeds these fancies that please me and add flavour to the dullest gathering. To be “seen home” would spoil all. I use my aristocratic insolence to absolutely forbid attempts to do so, and I dive complacently amid gibes of “Una!” and “Little Red Riding Hood!”

to emerge, free of them all, into a perfectly different world. Giving up my ticket to the sleepy man, who wishes me good-night as if he was wishing me "God speed," I am swallowed up by the soft, dark suffusion of cloudy dark spreading over and leaning down to the valley from the hill. They suppose I shall hurry, eager for my nice cosy bed. . . . On the contrary, I very often on warm nights find myself wandering outside the gates of safety for sheer pleasure, every fibre of me averse from "turning in."

Rainy nights, of course *non est*. I don't much care for moonlight nights—too boldly romantic. Old style. What I like are those wild, moonless nights when the hill is lapped, swathed, in a pall of obscurity, like the lightest of baby blankets, or the soft triturated earth they fling over our coffins at the last. . . .

I walk along delicately; my heel taps on the pavement seem a crime against the hour. . . . There are presences about that one need not arouse. . . .

I don't mean the people in the houses, lying awake, perhaps in apprehension, staring at the testers of their beds (all Lily's beds have old-fashioned testers), thinking of Zeppelins and their masks and their pails of sand. To Hell with precautions on a night like this, against an enemy like that!

No; I think I am afraid of awakening the wild beasts, the robbers, the bugbears of childhood, to which this region is given up. As of old, a lonely wayfarer is at their mercy. Yes, there is danger—fascinating, passionately alluring danger. It is unique, and we have to thank the Huns for it.

I don't always think in terms of Grimm's tales, however; sometimes it is the eighteenth century that supplies romance. The shaded lamps are like long-necked, masked ladies, peeping under their satin face-guards, stately—and malicious too. I pass the lamps quickly, and back into the dark which they are not, really, trying to irradiate with their mawkish gleam. . . .

I hardly ever meet any one. Once I saw a policeman nestling under the shadow of a porch with its overhanging tree. He was so still, he too had become a portion of the ghostliness of things. Perhaps if I touched him he would be cold and stiff like the Finsbury Circus policeman. But this one, as I passed, languidly flashed his lantern on his

buttons—eight of them—and they shone up to the Zeppelins lurking in the clouds. And he was not speechless; he offered to see me to my door. I refused. This materialization would have spoiled all.

But it is not so very easy to find one's way. There is a bit of road going up to Lily's where I have actually to feel along the wall for the turning I know is there.

And then comes her door, admitting me into the garden with the bust in it that a friend of Rowley Deane's once did of me. It is slightly over life-size. I had nowhere to put it, so Lily gave it a temporary home in the middle of her garden-plot.

I like it. It makes me look very majestic—a kind of Earth-Mother. I am enshrined in a grove of tall stalks of last year's hollyhocks, asters and sunflowers. I attend to its exterior sometimes. I don't like it to disgrace me. I wash its face now and then; I pick the snails out of its eyes. . . . Lily says I am disgusting. . . .

When I turn into that lone garden at night, I think with a sort of romantic joy that I shall see the bust again, gleaming like a big mushroom in the light of the neighbouring gas-lamp. I have to go quite near, to discern features. I always wonder if the trolls will have moved it away? For Gilbert Daru is killed. . . .

One does not know ever if anything will be as I left it? Shall I put my key in the lock as usual, and enter, and presently see the cheerful light in the hall bounce out in answer to the timid pressure on the electric button that might not have responded because it was enchanted? In order to give myself just this *frisson* I have insisted on the light being turned off, and Lily never objects to sentiment that leads to economy.

Yes, I like my life on the whole. I have never had my liberty. The war has given it me. But I only use liberty to afford myself these inane, non-vital sensations—the ghostly, the *macabre*. . . . Mother was so afraid that I should go the way of Ilsa: bring people in with me; compromise myself, somehow. And there *are* plenty of men about me nowadays to whom I deny the privilege of bringing me home, in order to enjoy the pleasures of the imagination I really exist for. It is so good in this cruel life not to have a personal heart—I think I have the heart of all the world. . . .

No, not all. I am incomplete. One sensation I miss, a sensation popularly supposed to depend on a man, but I find that that is a mere fallacy. I mean the divine *furor* of the dance, which is independent of sex, whatever sex-maniacs may say. That is denied me. That fibre is left out of me. Yet I feel it vicariously, with the touch of bitterness that comes from not being my own protagonist. I think I must be like Swinburne. . . .

I just can't dance.

I can remember the German waltz. I was hardly out then. I used to slouch about the ballroom at Beardmore on sufferance—very pretty, in a short frock, with a pigtail and a large bow—while Ilsa was having her triumphs, dancing like a fairy, as people said; but I realize now that she was dancing like a courtesan of old Corinth. I used to run away upstairs and hide myself in my own quiet room with my pictures, and my sleeping dog, and the moon-like gas-globe hanging over the pillow—the bedclothes turned down for the night in a strict V, the white coverlet folded and put on one side, according to Mother's tidy Scotch habits. . . .

And below, sardonic jigging, the smell of the candles that want snuffing, or the dust that the dancers' feet raises, the light on white wet necks, and the red stuff drying on the parted, parched lips. . . . Every one knows, I suppose, the longing to bolt from the noise and glitter of a party into the everyday; but I was too young, surely, to feel it so keenly?

I don't think that these sensations, or indeed any sensation at all, would be evoked by the new, complicated, stupid way of dancing that has come in since the war. I suppose it is that there are no more big ballrooms open, or good floors, or sonorous full-stringed bands, so the silly Fox-trot that can be danced on a carpet to the music of a gramophone has come in. The Tango, though of course I never could even begin to do it, filled every need of my being. And it was too bad, after every one, man, woman, and boy, had started to master its complications, as difficult as a proposition in Algebra worked out by the feet, that the war came, took the men, and it died!

Oh, the fascinating lilt of it! though I loved, too, the simple emotional quality of the old Victorian waltz music. I think into the vulgarity of Emil Waldteufel and Coote

there had crept something strident, acid, raucous, resembling nothing so much as the cry of the nightingales as we used to hear them in the thickets round Beardmore. Who calls it beautiful, unless Baudelaire is beautiful; or melodious, unless Wagner is? It is a hoarse wail, an inartistic, unmodulated shout of pain, the tale of one of those woes that are physical in their expression. Even Mother used to say that it was as if a beggar-woman had left her baby under a hedge and it was crying for her. The old dance music has for me that same quality of savage grief; even in its melody the same ground bass of profound misery. . . .

I know now why it was so sad. It was prophetic. It held in it the promise of the war, the seeds of partings. . . . All these men and women turning and swaying in each other's arms, sad and desirous, prosecuting their passionate loves—for what? That they might come together and make the bones that were to whiten the fields of Flanders! Why, if Ilsa, whom Audely says is so passionate, had had a child of any one of her *amours*, that son would have been out fighting by now! There *was* a man, at the time, that she adored, I remember—Paul Wyandotte; he would be fifty by now—that they would not let her have because he was rather a bad lot. Well, he was killed in the Boer War, with a book she had given him in his pocket that hadn't, alas! been stout enough to stop the bullet.

I have come to think she had better have had him and even been bullied and left! It is better to be miserable with some one than prosperous alone. . . .

I watch them dancing at Ciro's most evenings now, young men on leave—say Ilsa's sons she might have had—their poor necks smothered in those low khaki collars that seem to choke them even more than the high masher ones they used to have to wear, hot in their thick suits, and deeply oppressed by Sam Browne belts. I watch them, carefully padding round, first on one leg and then the other, in that absurd dance that seems all "waiting to be off," and I realize they are taking as much pains with their steps as if they had conned them out of a drill-book.

And then I think of the other dance, over there, that they may be called off to join in the next morning, where the floor is slippery enough, but not with beeswax, and the Master of the Ceremonies is a grim-lipped general who sends them prancing "over the top."



“Oh, what is this, that knows the road I came,  
The lifted, shifted steeps and all the way?”

Music! I want to hear much music now, and I have subscribed to Sir Henry Wood's concerts. Mother comforts herself in her own way; she has at least two library subscriptions. And so we try to welter through the indescribable misery and boredom of these times.

## XX

### *From The Lady Arles*

LONGRIDE ROAD.

I HAVE had to clinch the matter of the house suddenly, give up Clareville Grove that hung fire, and settle on one in Edwardes Square. Anything to get Venice out of the hands of Lily St. Just! I had hoped that arrangement would go on for another month and enable me to work off the rest of my visit to the dear Quains, but I have had accounts of Venice that disturbed me beyond everything and sent me rattling up to town to demand an account of her stewardship from Lily, to whom I had confided my ewe-lamb.

Good Effel wrote and said that she had met Venice in the Hampstead Tube one night, lately, at half-past eleven, alone, in evening dress with white embroidered slippers, and her cloak, unfastened as usual, over a gold tinsel evening dress. She never will cover up her neck, which doesn't matter so much when she is with me, but in the Tube it produced an effect which she appeared to be thoroughly enjoying, Effel said, though I set that down to the fact that dear Effel never appreciated Venice. Venice, at all events, was quite nice to Effel and very pleased to see her, but was careful not to say where she had been.

It was horrid news to get down here. I took my troubles to Gerald, the only man in the house, and he was sympathetic in a way, but so utterly ignorant of the delicacy of the issues involved! . . . He *can't* know exactly how it hurts *me* that my daughter should be stravaguing about, unshielded and uncared for at those hours, in a public carriage. . . . He says there are no more taxis to speak of, and also that Venice is all right, whatever she does: perfectly well able to take care of herself. I said, Yes; any daughter of mine would have that power in the ultimate

resort, but that I didn't care to have her doing "the Una touch," as he called it, when I had placed her carefully with a chaperon of my own choosing. He said the remedy was worse than the disease. Didn't I suppose that Venice was safer going about alone, or with a decent God-fearing man of the new order, like Percy Gregson, for instance, than under the control of a notorious ——! No, I can't set down the word he used. It was too hard on poor Lily. He said she was making Venice a sort of Yvette.

I was on to him like a knife about Mr. Gregson, and what he meant about Venice's going about with him. Did she? I insisted on being told, and why hadn't he told me before? He retorted that he wasn't out to spoil the poor kid's fun, and that, anyway, she was perfectly safe with old Gregson. It came out that he had seen her dining alone, or with Percy Gregson, in restaurants several times, and once with him and the other leader of the Labour Party at the National Liberal Club. And one night he happened to be up in town during a raid; he met them at a rotten little Italian restaurant that was all built of matchwood, and not thinking it safe, he had taken them both to his club near Piccadilly Circus, where they had stayed together in the cellar for four mortal hours. There was another woman there, but she was fainting all the time. . . .

*Autres temps, autres mœurs!* One can't look a raid-shelter in the mouth, so to speak, and I exonerate Gerald. But still, one felt that Lily was interpreting her duties with great laxity. The truth is, I hear, she is so occupied in ruining Bertie Corfe that she has no thought for anything else. I went to her straight and rescued my daughter. "Venice," (just) "Preserved" as Audely calls it. Oh, how I wish he wasn't in the army, then all this wouldn't have happened!

I had to listen to a frightful amount of talk from Lily, bent on asserting her innocence and her superior knowledge of the world. She protested that if I were more in the movement I would realize that there is no such thing as chaperonage nowadays. That it came to a natural end the moment Lady Evangeline—the first woman of title—crossed the Channel to be a hospital orderly!

I said she and her sister the Duchess were only sporadic. I don't choose to admit any relaxation—for our class, at any rate—of the rules that have held good for so long and produced so many specimens of decent womanhood. As a

matter of fact, one knows very well that, speaking physiologically, chaperonage is a necessary restriction on the high spirits of properly housed and fed and groomed people. I came to see that in the case of Ilsa, though with my Venice it is not coarseness, but delicacy that needs protecting. And the rôle of Una means a certain strain. It is all very well for middle-class girls to stand the racket, but it vitiates the nerves of maidens of finer clay. I *do* positively believe it is different clay, and nothing will convince me that it is good for Venice to be exposed to coarse contacts of this kind.

Of course my vulnerable point is still my eldest daughter. Lily got on to her, and asked me what about *her* contacts? Did I know what she was doing with herself these days?

Unfortunately, I don't. I tried to brazen it out, saying: "Whatever Ilsa's job is, it is a Government job, and may be dangerous to health or complexion or even life, but not reputation. Ah!—and she prefers not to risk upsetting me by telling me."

"And does she object to upsetting Archie, too?"

She was trying to imply that Ilsa was at her old tricks again. . . . I changed the subject, and came down on her for letting Venice have a latchkey. I said Venice would be the first Arles woman to have such a thing, and did she, Lily, know that her charge had been using it to stroll about the streets at night in the company of Labour Members, and such people?

She interrupted me:

"Oh, I know all about Percy Gregson. My advice to you, Beaty, is let him make an honest woman of her at once! He's a very good match, as things go, nowadays!"

She proceeded to waste on me some of her fresh copy of the fashion paper she writes for. She calls her stuff "*Sparklets*"—without much sparkle, I imagine? I never read her.

"Whether you like it or not, Beaty, she will have him if she wants him. Mothers have nothing to do with their daughters' matrimonial deals now, nor ever will again."

She proceeded to explain that I must make up my mind to the fact that Matchmaking, as a fine art, had gone out; that if the thing was to be done at all, girls had to do it for themselves. Any way, their chance is small and they have to hustle for it, like a place in a bus. She says she has

watched the bus fights from her car, at the corner by the Spitz, and notices that the strong, common, ill-bred women always manage to get a seat, while the pale, distinguished ones scorn to besiege the footboard, but turn away proudly and prepare to walk it. And so it follows that if girls want a place in a bus, or a husband, or what not, they must be prepared to struggle for it. Their best chance is to catch him in the course of their war work, where in the nature of things they are unchaperoned—except by numbers. She instanced Lady Ellen Reveley—the girl Venice always called Fair Ellayne le Violet because of her eyes, who is a widow and working now in the fields—and that funny little foreign-looking Zoë Courtauld, whom Venice made me ask to Lochroyan to please Lord Bertie Corfe, who is Lily's at present. She doesn't know I tried to help on the Courtauld alliance, and need not know it. We used to call Zoë, Constance Fille de Fay. (Oh, how it all comes back to me !)

It appears that Zoë is now secretary to Sir Bullace Schack, and he is a rich bachelor and Zoë rules his department absolutely, and will him. Mary Scrymgeour, another of Venice's Meinie, whose brother was killed in Gallipoli and her lover at Mons, is the life and soul of a jam factory.

Well, all she can get hold of there presumably is a jam boiler or refiner at best, and I detest this sort of backstairs matchmaking.

“Lily, who do you expect is going to come riding up like a knight of old and see Ellen Reveley in her furrow and her smudgy mud-coloured leggings, unless it is perhaps a man in khaki; and even if he does notice her, what can she make of it? She can't toss her curly locks at him—she has lovely hair, or had—because they are all tucked away under her cap, and her nose red with stooping over her mangel-wurzels! And Mary, in the jam factory, what chance has she? The visitors to that sort of place are generally old maids whose business it is to see, together with the girls' physical welfare, that nothing of that kind occurs!”

“Somebody's got to do the dirty work,” Lily said, begging the question.

“But not my daughter necessarily. What good, I ask you, would Venice be in a jam factory or on the land or in making explosives? I shouldn't like to eat her jam or trust her to milk my cow, and if they put her to handl :

T.N.T. she would certainly blow herself up and the rest of them too."

But Lily has got the right end of the stick in a way. The outlook *is* bad. Men, to speak from a business point of view, are at a shockingly high rate of premium, and they are, moreover, a kind of stock that is not unlikely to depreciate in value. The only men Venice *can* meet are mostly soldiers—on leave—and going back to hourly exposure to danger. I hope I am not a selfish beast, and I know that it would be got—or lost—in the country's service, but I can't say I want a son-in-law with permanent lung trouble, or a wooden leg! Yes, I agree with Lily, there are no gilt-edged securities in the matrimonial market just now, and that is nothing to complain of in these days, I suppose; but what is to become of the race if the world becomes so very like Heaven in this particular?

Again I found myself thinking about Audely and his letter to Venice. She has obviously let the feeling that provoked it die down for want of sustenance. Yet one would like to keep Audely in the family, somehow, in the killing off of good men that is going on and the prospective dearth of them. . . .

He hasn't gone out yet, but is still training, up in the North. I miss him dreadfully. It was so nice to have a man about the house. . . . The problem of Venice is becoming too much for me. . . . One thing I have done. I acted, and I acted quickly. I have taken her away from Lily's, as gently as I could, for I detest outstanding quarrels between two women who have to meet, and we have to put up here at Effel's, crowding her a bit, I fear, but it is only till I can get the lease signed of the Edwardes Square house, where I do hope we shall be happy at last.

## XXI

### *From The Lady Arles*

FELSHAM HOUSE, EDWARDES SQUARE.

WELL, here we are in the little house of dreams, as Venice is pleased to call it. I am glad to say that she is for the moment content with everything about it, and quite sees her way to the kind of life she likes. She says she is sick of staying in other people's houses, giving way to their whims and behaving "pretty." It is poor Venice's handicap, her strong theory of good manners. She accepts with exquisite politeness speeches and things that literally set her teeth on edge when she is under some one else's roof. Any outsider—host or hostess—can put upon her in matters of material discomfort, and she will bear it without a sign, allowing no one to guess from her manner that she is upset by them. She takes it out, I must say, by being a pretty good tartar at home, where, as she conceives it, manners don't apply. At home she will have her own way, and complains loudly if she doesn't get it, and even sulks. I shall never forget how she kept it up over the Leahy bridesmaidship. She reduced me a stone. Abroad, she contrives to keep even the famous pout in leash, though at home it is like a storm-cone hoisted, and we know what to expect.

Everything, including the house, is now *couleur de rose*. But the house is really grey, and small and low, and not too convenient, with its tiny windows looking on to the road over a tiny square patch of garden, which was lawn, but which Venice has forced me to flag all over. The poor dispossessed blades of grass insist on coming up between the slabs of stone, like the fringe on a d'oyley. In the middle Venice has had placed a green-bay tree we got from Harrod's. There is a fanlight, as desired by her, over the door which ought to show the hall lamp, but as we are forced to obscure it, and as there isn't a path, we are apt, on entering

at night, to lose our bearings and stumble over the green-bay tree, which is perhaps better than falling down the area steps. . . .

There is a back garden, too, with an old coachhouse at the bottom of it which a former tenant used as a studio. I have made this over to Venice for her sole use. She has turned it into a study with a door she can lock and put in a bell. We have all promised to ring whenever we want to see her and her door happens to be closed. We sit there in the evenings, and anybody who may happen to be dining with us—Ilsa or Effel or Ida, that is—when Venice has signified her willingness to have us there. The drawing-room is rather poky. Venice makes us coffee, very badly, it must be owned, and it takes everybody all their time to keep her sleeves out of the flame. But if there is a man there, Effel and Ilsa sit by with a scornful little smile on their faces and leave the care of Venice to him.

She has furnished it all herself—I mean her own taste—and Effel has machined her window curtains, etc. She used to be mad on William Morris furniture, now it is Post-Impressionism—Futurism—Vorticism—I wonder if I have got the sequence of movements right? They change like dressmakers' fashions; but *plus ça change*, they are still the same ugly sort of thing.

Rowley Deane is in France now, but while he was up on leave he did it all for her. Venice herself and Effel painted the wood work under his direction, and the doors too, of a good strong colour, but since they have blistered, and present great dun patches where all ought to be Prussian blue. Sh-h! Effel says. But that *is* the colour, so what's the use of saying it isn't?

Mr. Gregson tells me that the blistering is because the paint hadn't been properly mixed in the first place; he is jealous of Rowley Deane's prestige with us all. He knows plenty about painting and papering, too, from the circumstances of his early career, and isn't ashamed of it. Oh, no!

I should say myself, that even then it is silly to talk about it so much, for that's going to the other extreme. Socialists always make the mistake of rubbing in their origin too much before the people who just want to be able to forget it and take them on their merits. It's just as vulgar as if *we* were to brag about our upbringing. . . .

Rowley Deane's father is a vicar—poor man, for I don't



see how the most devoted son could take his father round one of his exhibitions! It would be an insult to Papa's cloth, unless he used that to cover his face! Still, in spite of his being so mistaken, I like Rowley. I like his independence. He maintains to my face, and I really believe he means it, that he wouldn't take Venice as a gift. Allowing for swank, I believe he detests her as a woman; she never *will* treat him as a man. He decorated her room for her out of pure good-nature, and has given her her own portrait, done at Lochroyan, I hated so. Although a bit of a white elephant, it does represent a certain amount of labour which he has cheerfully given away. And he has lent her an altar-piece—I hardly know what else to call it—though there is no Madonna in it. It is just lines, ruled apparently with a ruler, and circles and zig-zags galore, just where it occurred to him he would make them, like the scribblings of Planchette, or what the French call *pattes d'araignée* all over it. It takes up the whole of one wall from the ceiling to the skirting board—solid art all the way. She is strictly forbidden to put even a chair against it, and when I stuck a large jar of bul-rushes and green stuff in one corner, just to take off the rawness, he threatened to take the picture away altogether. I don't want that, for it isn't distempered behind it, and in war time it takes so long and is so difficult to get work done.

I am now used to it, and can sit in the studio with equanimity and even pleasure. At first I had to place myself so that my back was turned to the canvas, letting Ilsa and Effel sit facing it, Effel looking very sick, like a maid forced to ride back in a railway carriage.

The real drawback to Venice's study is that there is no covered way to it, and one has to walk across the open garden, however wet the day, to get there. And as the room is a new toy and she is running backwards and forwards to it all the time, there is a fearful lot of mud brought in on her feet and the tail of her gowns. And with these two haughty maids, we have to be so very careful. One must not irritate them, and unnecessary cleaning up is the most provocative of causes for these creatures throwing up their places and leaving you in the lurch. . . .

That is another of the reasons why I have set my face against pets of any kind—that and the way Venice has killed so many nice beasts, by neglecting them. Modern servants

won't look after animals, and she forgets. Henry was very anxious to give her one of his Great Danes, but I said frankly, if it was only to get it a home and he cared about it, he had much better shoot it. He is getting rid of most of his horses and the dogs, especially the Duchess' famous breed of Pekingese, as I dare say you have read in the papers. Minna having become head of the "*Put Down Your Pets*" League, can't possibly keep them; and as she says in one of her leaflets, has to set an example by beginning at home.

Henry has been very kind and all! He was so pleased with me for my determination to draw in and reduce expenditure by taking a smaller house that he has helped me where the shoe pinched most—*i.e.* Venice's comfort—breaking the shock as gradually as possible to her, sending us fish and game and venison and giving Venice useful presents of things that used to come to her naturally, but that are beyond our present scale. He always did make her an allowance, but it wasn't so very much, as he said himself, for the richest peer in England to give his favourite niece. She has not been such a favourite since she became a Vorticist, in more ways than painting. . . . And then her Aunt Minna, being one of *your* husband's compatriots and an extremely moneyed person herself—takes exception to Henry's open-handedness and generosity to Venice; that is to say, the allowance, ratified before his marriage, to her. She has never made her niece a present in her life; she doesn't care to waste any more money on the expenses of her title, now that she has got it.

Excuse me, I do hate that woman, who has nearly succeeded in taking my own brother away from me. I see very little of her, and as Henry is more or less under her thumb it entails my seeing much less of him than I should like.

The less, however, for Venice's sake he is here, the better. When he does pay us a visit I can see that he isn't very well pleased with the use she has been putting his money to, *re* the garden-room. I notice his frightened glance around as he raises his head—he is very tall—after going through the door, and is faced by something that looks for all the world like a bursting bomb of many colours spreading all over the west end of the room.

Venice generally receives people standing right back up against it; she has been told, I believe, that this extravaganza in colours suits her style of beauty. Henry said,

sullenly, that she looked like a snowdrop sprouting out of a red brick flower-pot. That was his polite way of saying he didn't admire the flower-pot.

Flower-pot reminds me of another grievance of Tinkler, the house-parlourmaid I have succeeded in getting, and whom I have all the trouble in the world to keep. She is most particular about her own work; she keeps all the silver we use—the bulk is in the bank—most nice, and her personal appointments, cap and apron and so on, are a dream. But she objects intensely to what she calls "cleaning up after Lady Venice," so that many a time I have to go and get the dustpan out of her cupboard under the stairs and go down on my knees on the floor to make good, say, after Venice has been "doing" the flowers, arranging and rearranging them in colour schemes . . . or making tea with the electric kettle, or bringing in stray animals to feed, as she is very fond of doing. She is too soft-hearted to stand a cat or dog crying outside for shelter in the night—it isn't always for shelter, but one can't expect her to distinguish that—and it annoys the girl to find a cat ramping about the drawing-room when she comes in of a morning.

Venice won't realize the necessity of humouring these creatures, or that if you say much to them they are off to munition works in a trice, where they get more wages than I can afford to give them, and *all* their Sundays.

Government Money! They are simply rolling in it. And they have only dress and chocolate drops to spend it on, mostly. I remember the time when I thought it cheek of Effel—and *she* was a very superior servant: more of a friend—to sport a white petticoat, except, perhaps, on Sundays for church. But I couldn't go on a bus all last summer, in my plain foulard with white spots and my darned gloves, without meeting all the little girls of the Effel class, and much lower, wearing white. Their skirts certainly are mere vallances resting on their black-leaded boots, like pinked-out frills on a coffin, and generally topped by a woollen Tammy and no gloves at all, but the accessories will come. They will learn to attend to their extremities in time, as Frenchwomen are supposed to do. None of us dared to wear white this summer, except Venice now and then, and that was only because Effel very kindly got up some of her old ones for her, as a favour to me, and because a White Snowdrop ought to dress in white. But on my word, the

lower classes seemed to positively riot in white linen and muslin. It used to enrage me, walking through the slums to my Old Women's Friendly, to see all the little gutter children playing in the middle of the street, rigged up in what might have been sections of Ilsa's best "nighties," ethereal blobs of white squatting complacently in the mud. . . . I used to think on a fine day, in the sun, they looked like your Uncle Henry's cygnet farm at Cottingley Manor, and mused as I watched the little pampered brats making mud pies in muslin, playing hop-scotch—I think it is called?—in white shoes and stockings, on the way things change. And their frowsy mothers sitting on stone doorsteps, with a heap of Swiss embroideries across their knees, smacking it in the good old fashion! As for baby ribbon, it is positively run through everything runnable. Ilsa says she has long since left off attempting to keep pace with the luxurious underclothes of her "general," who wears silk stockings and doesn't even bother to steal hers, which are, she admits, only Lisle thread.

I am afraid Ilsa's excursion into respectability hasn't profited her wardrobe much. She says that the white robe of innocence doesn't depend on conduct in these days, but on the laundry tariff, and that its hem gets soiled now—not so much with evil communications as street mud. . . .

Mr. Gregson tells her and Venice, that it is the rising of the tide that even King Canute could not bid retire. It signified the Uplifting of the People, the Decline and Fall of the Middle Class. "Middle Class" seems to leave Us politely out. But it doesn't really: there are only two classes now, Us and the Others. The Others are going to eat Us up.

Unless we choose to think better of it, sink ancient prejudices and ally ourselves with them? That is what Venice says. She is pretty nearly converted to Socialism by now.

I don't know who first mooted the idea, he, she, or I, but certainly there is a plan on foot that Mr. Gregson should come and take up his abode with us, just to see how we all like it. I have not mentioned it to Henry yet, but he rather suggested himself that I should take a paying guest to eke out the money a little, and to keep me company while Venice was away at work. She was thinking of war work then. . . .

I am considering the plan. It represents a very sudden

jump for me, doesn't it ? I shall call myself the new Quintia Curtia.

For, as Percy Gregson says, it is no use ever to try to control the rising tide of anything, and it may be left for me to be the first to leap into the yawning gulf of democracy. It may be just possible to stem the tide if the two opposing forces join hands !

Venice is against the notion. She thinks she may get too much of Percy's company, deeply as she enjoys it. She wants to preserve her clarity of vision, and he is rather a domineering personality. As a matter of fact, I think he bores her by lecturing her instead of paying her compliments, which she would like, even from a man she is not thinking of from that point of view. I should be able to make him pay at least his equitable share of the household expenses—rather more perhaps, as we should be stretching a point in having him. On the other hand, it might estrange your uncle, from whom great regular blessings flow. It isn't likely we could persuade him to want to see much of Percy, whom he knows, of course, well enough by reputation. But as it is he comes here so seldom ! I have my club to take him to ; it is nearer for him than coming all the way out to Kensington. And of course, *per se*, he cannot object to Mr. Gregson, who has gained by his talents quite a fair social position of a kind. People think very highly of his prospects, and Gerald's prophecy to me anent his future has been endorsed by impartial people several times. It is quite on the cards that he may come to rule us all.

He has a tremendous following. Even Henry admits that the fellow has the gift of eloquence—the gab, he put it—and the Quains simply go Nap on him ; but that's friendship. Venice and I have been to one or two of his meetings and we come back carried away. No one coughs when he speaks, and the silence is so tense that you can hear the hairpins and collar studs dropping. It seems to be a fully accepted proposition now that he “will do something,” and all say that he is a perfect demon for work and gets through the job of ten men in half an hour.

And—alas, that it should be so !—the class that he stands for has come now to hold all the trump cards. That is why I fancy the Government never interfere with any of his meetings, and yet seditious enough things are said there in all

conscience. But when he gets up to speak, he says worse, and he has "such a way wid him" that he is left alone while others are put in jail.

The *Ancien Régime* must shake hands with the Mammon of Labour. I will hold out mine, I believe.

One thing, he doesn't flirt with Venice the least little bit in the world, so far as I can see, so that it would be safe enough to allow a greater juxtaposition. Unless indeed, girl-like, that appeals to her. But I know her make thoroughly. She likes devotion, of a romantic, troubadourish, sort, but would run a thousand miles from any one who didn't approach her physically in the most spiritual way possible. Even when he looks at her, as he often does, without meaning to, with his deep, dark, glowing eyes that his mother gave him and so he can't help, I fancy it makes her slightly uncomfortable. He is good looking, but in a sort of furry, unkempt way, like a harmless wild beast strayed out of the wood. There is far too much hair lying about and clouding his magnificent forehead. He has a bad figure: no presence at all until he is seen on a platform, and then it seems transfigured, in some way, with enthusiasm.

I foresee that if I can get over the Duke's objections, and if Venice can be persuaded to tolerate a P.G. actually in the house, I shall take him in for a bit and see how it works. It may. There is no reason I can see that it shouldn't. He certainly keeps Venice amused, and takes her about and educates her mind, and the distance in rank makes it a sheer impossibility to consider any alliance between them, if that is what you are thinking of. A flirtation, of course, is still more impossible; you can marry where you can't flirt, so I always think.

There is another factor in my affairs which has come up, and upsets me very much, for it adds so to my difficulties in running the house. Effel Lucy is, after all her promises, going to have a baby, and will be of no manner of use to me by and by.

## XXII

### *From The Lady Arles*

EDWARDES SQUARE.

MY dear, I ought not to repine. I took this house of my own free will, but oh, the difference of being in one postal district or another ! It is enormous. I have always thought it was a letting stunt of the agent's. I never thought much of Park Crescent when I was in it; there was too much basement and area space, and one never knew what the servants were up to. But here we have no back door at all. Imagine what that means ! The wrong sort of publicity. The butcher boy brings the joint, another little devil brings the fish, another the vegetables, and they all three yaup down the little area in front of the dining-room windows to summon the cook. Then twice a week the dustman calls to fetch the remains of all this plenty, and the dust of our ancient meals blows down our nostrils. All the processes of life, in fact, are carried on under our eyes and noses. Anatole, if he had been still alive and our cook, couldn't have carried on either of his professions, but would have left us in a week. . . . We have a square opposite, but it is a poor exchange for a majestic park like the Regent's. And it is cat-ridden and full of stray dirty dogs and noisy chirping sparrows that break one's rest. . . .

Although the little house is beginning to look very pretty inside, very few people see it. One has not the face to invite people to come so far to get so little. If Audely was here now, to bring nice men around ! Percy does introduce a certain number of his pals, and no doubt they do talk very interestingly, and Venice can answer them in their own style. Her own old artistic friends keep on coming for what they can get, but for me there is not much social distraction. Effel is always good for a gossip, but she is not able to walk so far, now. Henry is very kind in coming; he walks out

from Belgrave Square; but Minna says she can't get here without a car, and she has put that down, so we must do without her till things are better. . . . We *do* do. To see Minna isn't the only reason one wants the war to end.

I seem to be in for a horribly dreary winter; but then, I suppose everybody else of my age is. And History in my case is repeating itself. When I was a girl, you know, your grandfather had to retrench a good deal, and he chose to take his family to live at a village a few miles out of Edinburgh. Of course he rode in and out easily, but for the women of the family there was only the family chaise, and going was very bad, what with mud and ruts, and it was as likely to get stuck in a ditch as not. So we women, as usual, practised patience and hoped for better times. I was the youngest, and my head was nearly turned when Arles came along, literally riding by from the Abercorns' where he was staying, and rescued me like a knight of old from dullness and despair. I was awfully in love with him; but even if I hadn't been I should have taken him, for he represented the only way out. And thus I was married at eighteen, and pitchforked into diplomatic life. . . .

Well, one result of this dreadful war is that I seem to myself to be living through those times again. I often feel inclined to head my letters "Our Village," after the name of a book we used to like when I was a girl. London, except the bit near Pall Mall and Piccadilly, is just an overgrown village like the one Miss Mitford described. All the penalties of being gregarious and loving your kind, such as she describes, are there. Even if one is asked out for a game of Auction in some one else's house, one's going depends on the weather and a host of other little things. The dark is as full of dangers for an unprotected female as ever it used to be at Lammachie. In the old days, if a woman trusted herself out alone in the dark, she was supposed to be mad or anxious to be bad. Venice goes everywhere alone, now, under protest from me; but what can I do? Percy Gregson volunteers to escort her, sometimes, and does; but I don't know which is worse, going about alone or alone with a man—and a Socialist at that? . . .

I myself, although there is no question of chaperonage for me at my age, prefer to stay at home as much as possible. There are hardly any cabs, and when you do get one the driver is raw and new to his work, and drives recklessly,



That affects one, whether one is inside or out, for they absolutely ignore the claims of pedestrians.

There is nothing—even if we are quite sober, which of course we all are; the spirits are diluted past bearing and one would as soon drink ginger-beer!—nothing to keep us on the pavement except a wavy white line of chalk that the first rain shower washes out and that the authorities are in no particular hurry to replace, since it is only for the convenience of us poor civilians. Everything now is for soldiers. . . .

Theatres are of course out of the question, though we need not be, as Miss Mitford was, afraid of footpads between here and Kensington Gore. The burglars and such like, they say, have gone to the front, as hospital orderlies. It's the dark that is so trying. It's what Venice calls Cimmerian gloom. The street lamps are all blotted out with lamp-black, and as for the arc-lights they are gone, wholly. You remember that splendid one in Belgrave Square, just opposite your aunt's ballroom window, that shone with such a cruel glare that it made the balcony absolutely impossible as a sitting-out place, and which spoilt many a proposal, I dare say?

My mother, I suppose, never having known the elaborate system of street lighting we have set up, would have done without it, and have been fairly at home in the old country road of Oxford Street, or threading her way through the woods of South Kensington and Holland Park. But of course she would have had a John with a lantern? and a calash over her head made of stiff whaleboned silk. We haven't even got a John to hang on to, and Venice, far from wearing anything like a calash, now insists on going out without any head-covering at all, which annoys me very much. Because the times are out of joint, you needn't accentuate the licence and disorganization unnecessarily.

She chose to walk to a dinner at Ciro's, given by an American authoress and her literary crowd last Friday, bareheaded, in a thin opera cloak, for a bet she had with Miss Twells, of *The Beauty's Friend* (which still goes on, though you can hardly get grease for food, now, let alone for cosmetics). I did not oppose the scheme when I was laughingly told of it; what was the good? I only said it was a long way to walk to furnish Meg Twells with a spicy paragraph, but that I expected it was safe enough, for all the lions had left the path and gone to France.

Ilsa retorted that one never knew if a lion-on-leave wouldn't come—to protect, and remain—to be a beast, which was she supposed, what Venice wanted?

Still, Venice insisted on carrying out the plan, and was rather disappointed to have to tell us that no lion, or any man at all spoke to her, except a policeman, who requested her to move on, because she sat down on the steps of the Albert Hall to rest, in her red cloak. I dare not interfere with Venice's efforts to keep herself amused, but I must say I am always anxious till I hear her latchkey turning in the lock and her step on the stairs. If Percy is out with her, as he sometimes is, I go to sleep. He is quite safe.

I attempt to amuse myself as much as possible at home. I get up some Auction, or even cut-throat Bridge. Ilsa and Archie, on Saturdays and Sundays when he is at home, come in, and there is Effel; and Molendinar stirs his old stumps, and comes to me, trying to take the place of Audely as far as possible. No one ever could, though. And there is Ida the brave, who will go anywhere for a game. Gerald is away at his office till nine nowadays, and too tired to do anything but go to bed. Sometimes I go out, as far as possible keeping within a radius of a few hundred yards. I put on goloshes in case it has come on to rain before I get back, and a torch which isn't allowed, but which I can just flash on for a moment when I have lost the kerb. I am timorous, and not what I was. I had rather stay at home, when all is said and done, than affront the perils of the night.

There was a famous great-great aunt of mine who used to say, very proudly, "Well, well, sooner than be idle I'd take a book!" I never did read much, but now I try to make up for lost time. The nicest time I have is when Venice has nowhere to go, which happens sometimes. Then she and I, after curfew time, as I call it, get round the fire and toast our toes—Venice her legs. The front of her legs is quite raw with constant exposure to the fire. We draw the curtains close. One has to keep out every scrap of light, which makes the room horribly stuffy, but that's better than bombs—and read, read. . . . I have taken out a double subscription with a nice obliging little man near here who keeps all the newest books back for me, and Venice has her London Library subscription, which comes in very handy for her "war-work"! |

Percy, being a man, has managed to get Venice to work. She makes indexes or something. . . . Historical digests. . . . She is good at history, you know. . . .

I used to tax her with using her Library subscription merely to procure Improper Memoirs, but really I am quite glad of anything, proper or improper, that enables her to stand a few quiet evenings with her mother. Percy is hardly ever in in the evenings, his work is so arduous. And poor Venice gets asked out less and less—a regular tragedy for her. Nobody cares to ask her to Ciro's, for she doesn't dance the new dance, and one can't sit out there, it appears. And Lily St. Just, who used to take her to places, never stirs out of her own house after dark; and, as she is an intrinsically dull woman, she finds her society falling off very much, now that she has ceased to entertain them at the Spitz or the Berkeley. So now she goes to bed at nine, she says, to save the expense of lights, although she has fifty thousand a year. Too thin!

So it is books, books, all the time; never had authors such a vogue! I hope they appreciate it, and how we read them and keep pace with modern thought, now that the more pressing claims on our time and intelligence have ceased to exist. As a matter of fact, a popular hostess, such as I flatter myself I used to be, never finds time for useless or fancy reading. I found, on thinking it over, that I had not opened a book for over twenty years, except, perhaps, a light novel or so, travelling, or when I had a bit of a headache and was disinclined for any exertion. But now there is no travelling, and, thank God, one seldom has a headache, and yet one has taken quite seriously to reading.

My books never last me long enough, and I take to dipping into some of Venice's, though the moment one gets interested they begin to turn it into Latin, which I can't make out. It's an odd thing. . . .

Percy says that soon we shan't even have any new books at all; that paper is getting scarcer and scarcer, and all luxury trades will have to go. Well, *à la guerre comme à la guerre*, and we must not cavil at this. But I get annoyed and rather suspect insincerity when little Mr. Biss, who is often here—a faithful friend who hasn't dropped us because we live in a small house—when he starts grousing about his trade prospects, trying to make us realize (?) that he really is a good friend, because he cheerfully dropped three

hundred pounds on Venice's poems. I don't believe that. If Venice's name, before the war, couldn't sell a hundred copies, he is a bad publisher, and I tell him so. Then I turn to comforting him, for he is so depressed, and admit that we cannot do without him and his like: that books won't be allowed to go; that they are an anodyne—a sleeping draught, the kind of drug we used to leave it to the Germans to make, but that we are now bucking up and making for ourselves. We have surely, I say, a few authors left, *not* in khaki, or returned, slightly wounded and not in the head. Those that do come back have bucketsful of experiences and things they have observed out there, while those that stayed at home can write about home matters and create an atmosphere, and persuade us, while we are reading at any rate, that we are *not* at war!

"Oh," Mr. Biss exclaims, brightening, "if they would only be content to do that! I could sell a thousand copies of a new Miss Austen or Miss Mitford that you were speaking about the other day!"

Then Venice suggests languidly that if he couldn't manage to publish, we should have to do without him and go back to the Minnesinger or jongleur. She quoted that lovely:

"The way was long, the wind was cold . . . . The minstrel was infirm and old. . . ."

Teasing poor little Biss, she proposed that he should engage a number of authors to agree not to print their books on any condition whatsoever, but learn elocution, so as to be able to recite their own work at people's houses. . . . Then the young untried authors might go round on spec, like the infirm and old minstrel, but young and dashing, with their first books. . . .

Mr. Biss rose to it; he said, with his mouth all awry and tears in his voice

"All very fine, Lady Venice, but where do I and my profits come in—in your scheme?"

"That's a merely ignoble preoccupation, Mr. Biss," Venice said cruelly. "Unworthy of you, which I must just brush aside." I said, if it was Wells or Bennett, or one of the popular ones, he would have to stick very tight to his manuscript, and be sure, before he began to read, that there wasn't any clever person about, or there would be a syndicate formed for a band of "Repeaters," and the public would have to put up with twice-told tales more likely than not.

Venice suggested that the author would have to counter that by giving "gag"—something fresh supplied by himself on the spur of the moment. I rather agreed with her: gag is often the best part of a Revue. The clever actors manage to edge in all the things that the censor would cut out, and thus make the piece run for a long time. . . .

All this didn't interest Mr. Biss much, and he took up his hat and went, *la mort dans l'âme*, Percy said. Venice carried on the conversation with Percy, saying that what we consider the best of Shakespeare is, as often as not, just "gag," that has got incorporated in the acting version, supplied to make up for failure of memory or an improperly rehearsed part by the actor. In some cases it would be Shakespeare himself. But not necessarily; all the Elizabethans, she thinks, were of a piece with Shakespeare, and she herself prefers Webster.

Venice is growing rather strong in her judgments, I consider, and it is a pity. Shakespeare *is* Shakespeare, and you can't go behind that! . . .

Of course this theory would account for the fact that Shakespeare didn't care to publish his own plays in his lifetime?

## XXIII

### *From The Lady Arles*

EDWARDES SQUARE.

YOU say, dear Laura, that there is a plethora of Percy Gregson in my last two letters, and that you fancy he is installed here. He is, as P. G. Don't be too down on me; you ought not, being a democratic American.

I really don't exactly know how it happened. I didn't want it at all; Venice not very much. He did, very much indeed, and he swayed us to his will, just as he does his meetings, I suppose. And it is, after all, only temporary, just to see how we like it. He is extraordinarily good company: has something original to say about everything.

There are advantages on both sides. Of course they lean very much over his, although, strange to say, some of his ancient pals and supporters think otherwise. Mrs. Leahy doesn't approve of his domestication with a Countess at all, and goes about saying loudly that it will injure his prestige with his own side, and that it is the beginning of the end—for him..

She calls herself his political foster-mother, because she discovered him. She loves him like a son, and hates to see him playing ducks and drakes with his reputation.

It is an odd view to take of what most people would call a social rise for a man like that, due entirely to his great talents that drive people of light and leading to take him up. And she is politically wrong. Socialists love a title, albeit under the rose of spoken disapproval. To my mind it shows the purity of Percy's intentions, that he goes straight from *my* house to his meetings and spouts democratic views, kicking off as it were for the Great Popular Football Match of the World, from The Last Ditch. So Ilsa remarked, on one of the rare occasions she spent an evening with us. She is always rather humorous about Percy,

though I notice she never addresses him directly. I believe, with her curled nostril, she scents the enemy of her order, the destroyer of her people ?

But if it has to be, it has to be. Coriolanus went over to the camp of the enemy, and he was a real Last Ditcher—proud, stiff, and unprogressive. So they say. I don't grudge this little Jack the Giant Killer—another of Ilsa's sobriquets for him—the advantage of association with us. There is something fine and tragic about it all, which Ilsa, occupied with getting her shot in and being funny about Percy, doesn't see. There is nothing really funny about it ; I consider it rather tragic that Percy, the traitor in the gate, should, as it were, go forth, primed by us, for our own destruction. He will bring his forces against the hand that has fed him with social knowledge, given him some tips to supplement the excellent board-school education we are taxed for, bringing up these young vipers that will sting us later on. Board-school education isn't everything, though admittedly the best in the world.

I talk, don't I ? as if Percy was one of Dr. Barnardo's boys setting out with a box of squibs to wreck the Home ! It's sheer romancing of course, and would make an article for Mr. Biss. But even if it were to come true, and we *are* doomed to be swept away by the hordes of barbarism, I prefer that we should die by our own hand, as it were. For the atmosphere will have become too caked with grime for people like us to live in it, and the Last Ditch untenable by people who can't stand fetidity. I verily believe the whole idea of even first-class travelling originated by people who are sensitive to smells trying to put a barrage between themselves and the irritating of the olfactory nerve.

Of course we don't talk like this before poor Percy—it is mostly Ilsa and I when we get alone. And Percy is not bad—he *does* improve. He has the sense to allow nice women to help him and sermonize him. He comes to me and says, rumpling his rumpled hair :

“ My lady, do you know the reason I hate tea parties is that I never know when to take a lady's cup away.”

I told him to leave out “ my lady ” ; and as for the teacup not to take it away at all ; never think of it. It is his business to make her forget it.

Percy is excessively concerned about this sort of thing. You wouldn't believe how people of that kind worry about

minor points of behaviour, and make themselves miserable about the trifles that we never think of, because, whichever way we do it, that makes it right. He is bothered over the eating of asparagus, wondering if he shall cut off the ends or hang the whole stalk over his mouth, or use the silver tongs they sometimes give you. All I can say is, I never will use the absurd things. I've seen Venice put her hand in the dish and scrabble the blades out. It looks all right when she does it, but I should not recommend that course to him.

He might very nearly almost be a law unto himself, he is so good-looking! I have never seen such bright eyes as his. Venice thinks them indecently so; she says it marks the plebeian in him. I can't agree with her. There is Owen Meredith the poet—one of Us—with eyes that go through your head, so piercing they are!

Percy's weak point is, of course, his hair, which shows lack of breeding, somehow. It always *looks* dusty, and has generally a little wisp standing straight up about the back of his head where the parting starts from, you know. I've noticed this symptom in board-school children. Perhaps it signifies lack of attention in youth. And his ears stick out. I suppose his mother didn't go to his cot and turn them down as he slept when he was a baby.

In the dark evenings, when he isn't speaking anywhere, he sits with us in Venice's studio and talks to us—lets off things that are, I suppose, too strong for meetings. Venice fights him: partly from conviction and partly for the sake of argument, for I see he is rapidly converting her to agree with him on most points. It is as good a craze as another! Venice always must have a craze.

I let him criticize Our Class, occasionally correcting him when he goes too far and talks nonsense through ignorance. I believe I am protecting our interests, instilling the truth into the mind of a conductor of the emotional current to those below. He is astonishingly ignorant about Us, but willing enough to be instructed. He thinks of Us as of an old Persian vase—very rare, old, unique, and soon to be broken. England's decorative asset! Or like the flowers that used to be set all round the cottage vegetable bed merely for "pretty." That's what we have come to, in the eyes of these exceedingly modern men whom this exceedingly modern war has brought forth.



Both Venice and he agree that we have, as a class, done well, come forward nobly; but both are agreed that it is no more than our duty: we were bound to fulfil our feudal obligation. And so we have. (I say the Socialists will have another advantage—that of numbers, for there are hardly enough of us left to breed from.) Percy admits too, but rather grudgingly, that we aren't so terribly plutocratic as some of his mates maintain. And as for incomes, well, except for your Uncle Henry and the Duke of Dalruan and the Corfes, the Aristocracy and the landed gentry both are getting as poor as church mice, whatever that amount is?

Of course the rich Jews who have taken our old places that we have had to yield up to them under stress of poverty, are "rolling"; but then, as Audely says, they represent a very small minority—just the *fine fleur* of the financial *parterre*, and don't matter for purposes of argument. I should have got on badly in these discussions if I hadn't a good memory and had not got Audely's speeches to draw on, for the discomfiture of Venice and Percy.

But truly, Laura, I can count on my fingers all my own relations who are to be called well off, in the usual acceptance of the term; and as for the others, who are living on their lands in comparative penury, their name is legion. There are the Scrymgeours—you won't call that a mushroom-growth family! Well, I never accept an invitation to Marmond now. I don't think it fair to strain their resources to the extent of entertaining us. Simon Scrymgeour has six thousand a year, but such a lot to do with it. It all goes, pretty nearly, to keeping up Marmond as it should be kept up, and it isn't even that. Yet he won't sell an acre of it, and Constance and the girls suffer. There are three of them at home now, Georgie, Alice, and Margaret. The others have managed to get ladylike non-paying work somewhere. Mary is the only one who is earning good money. Constance Scrymgeour can hardly bear to think of it, yet I tell her that it is only by going out into the arena and fighting with wild beasts that you get a living wage, for women. The three left at home have to help their mother to keep up appearances, and do as much work as they can without seeming to be drudges or soiling their lily hands. They see hardly any one at Marmond Abbey; it is ten miles from Raby, and no one has any horses; so it isn't difficult to put a good face on their poverty. Constance

herself looks after the poultry, and Georgie plants and gardens, and scrapes up enough vegetables for the table. They get nothing in from outside except a few groceries. They don't go in for new clothes, poor dears! but just potter about the home paddocks and the yard in goloshes and waterproofs. I did hear that Simon Scrymgeour once condescended to kill a pig himself, but made such a mess of it that he never did it again. Did you ever hear that he is under statutory obligation to hang a criminal in the last resort, and once, when Berry didn't arrive at the jail in time, Simon performed the office for him, and enjoyed it? I hope it was a greater success than the pig. He is rather an old-fashioned brute, Simon.

And the furniture! There hasn't been an upholsterer in for years, or anything bought since 1861. I remember it last time I was there—leather-seated chairs in the dining-room, all eaten away as it were, with the stuffing bursting out of them at the corners, and the faded rep curtains at the immense windows, and poor Simon standing, looking out at his vista—that he pulled a whole village down to make clear—swinging the blind tassel and whistling the tune the old cow died of, as Mary said in her unfeeling way. . . .

Percy makes fun of my instances. These poor derelicts of an obsolete industry, he says, are not worth powder and shot, and would probably be given a grant to reinstate themselves a bit by the People's Government. What he is really down on are the rich manufacturers and iron masters and soda and coal magnates, who are making money hand over fist, and always were, before the war.

Audely said something one night here, and I really thought Percy's eyes would burn him up. What Audely said, in his rather offending drawling way, was that he would soon be out in France "fighting for my dividends."

I saw what Audely meant, and that if England didn't come out on top, my shares in Elswick and Northwich wouldn't be worth much. But the speech upset Percy, and he began to abuse the class no one there belonged to; so it was not exactly rude, but rather wearing.

I have had a good deal of hospitality from these sort of people in the past, so I stood up for them. I must not forget that dear Sir James Molendinar comes in for some of his diatribes, and Mr. Manville in Newcastle, where Venice and I used to go and stay and be quite comfortable in a tasteless

sort of way, but they meant exceedingly well. Only the very air was dirty—coal-dust over everything—and we lived under a pall of smoke and had to wash our faces every five minutes.

But the result of my observations is that capitalists, as a rule, are *not* bloated. I have seen a great many more lean captains of industry than fat ones in my day. Poor creatures, to keep all they have gained they have to work so hard and have so much anxiety! I knew one who, until he took the helm of affairs after his father's death, was a charming artist and prominent feature of the walls of the Royal Academy. Well, a short while after his succession, he was obliged, by the sheer weight of the management of the huge property his father left him—he didn't even interfere with the conduct of the business, he was too sensible for that—the duties of his own private fortune alone forced him to abandon his art, and he died at forty, of heart disease.

And there is Gordon Montagu—everybody knows Gordon and the other two brothers—he is bald at thirty, and wears spectacles. Venice says he looks like an intelligent gnome, unused to the light of day.

Well, no wonder, for he hardly ever gets any sleep, but spends the nights careering over Britain and Wales in a car, chasing contracts for his firm, which, as it supplies one of the most useful things of all, we could not well do without. His dear little wife hardly sees anything of him. But suddenly, at breakfast in Yorkshire, he appears, when she is thinking he is over in Ireland.

“I caught him at Fishguard—or Plymouth!” he will say triumphantly, wolfing into his sausage. That would be Messrs. So and So's foreign agent. He had pulled off a big deal. But surely it is the dividend holders, not he, or she, poor child, who profit by his red eyes and ruined health?

The strain must be awful. I hear Rockefeller can't get to sleep for it. Percy snorts when I tell him about Rockefeller, and says it's the luxurious surroundings keep him awake. I say, people who don't work actually with their hands are paid for strain. They positively need an *entourage* of delicacy—otherwise called luxury—which would only tease a man who wasn't used to it. People whose physical powers have been impaired by the strenuousness of their job, to a degree inconceivable by the working population,

have to have their minds as well as their muscles relaxed. It requires more energy, I tell Percy, to sit in an office all day and sign papers, than to wield a pickaxe or to extract coal, lying conveniently on one's side in a quiet coal-seam all day. . . .

They all hooted when I said that, but I went on, for I wanted to make them understand. When a big business man at last knocks off work and goes home, what he needs is a quick car to take him there and let him plunge quick into a hot bath in a tiled, sympathetically tinted bathroom, with a change of linen after it, instead of a tub in front of the kitchen fire and a rough cotton shirt. You might, it seems to me, as well treat brain-fag and shell-shock as if they were a broken arm or leg.

Venice has got hold of a wild book by Upton Sinclair, which she uses to smite me. I glanced into it one day; it is not nice reading, I must say: all about poor children with "fishes' lips and bleary faces, lined with their own dirt." Well, that is better than some one else's; and why can't their mothers wash the sand out of their eyes? Water is always procurable.

Ida, who was here one night when we were arguing, put in something I must say I have never thought of, and that is the fact that in the poorer homes the water and the towel are never near together, or the soap either. If you wash in the back yard, you can't hang a dry towel and a cake of soap on to the pump handle. There is something in that!

"The fishes' lips" story worked on me so that the other day I thought I would go and put my name down for a couple of hours a week at Social Service, thus taking away only two hours from Venice. Lily St. Just told me that there was a woman in Kensington who comes to her for subscriptions, and always says they have not enough helpers even to apply the money properly. I went to Notting Hill Gate Station—farther than I meant—and started to walk back towards Campden Hill. I hit on some bad slums. . . . "Goodness me!" I said to myself, "I hope Lily St. Just's friend won't set me to go and minister in any of these houses, even if they *are* starving inside. The smell will be awful. But I shall have to go where I am sent."

And just as I was thinking of that, a nice clean slice of white bread was thrown out of an upper window at my feet, and when I had walked a yard farther, looking up to find

out what window they came out of, two more. I stooped as if to pick them up, and another slice hit me and broke into smithereens upon my back.

I was disgusted by this awful waste and extravagance, and went straight home without troubling Lily and her friend.

When I told Ida this, she said it was probably an isolated case of waste. These people were ignorant even of their own misery. . . . Or it might have been small children left alone in an upstairs room while their mother was out working, who had got at the perambulator where the bread was kept? The last baby, perhaps? I dare say she was right, and I vowed to make the Kensington pilgrimage again.

It is a funny, but rather pleasant thing; but Audely declares he likes Percy. I was always so afraid he wouldn't. He says Percy is sincere. *Of course* he is sincere. It appears to be a shibboleth with one party to always say the other isn't sincere. I don't fancy Audely himself is sincere in saying that Percy is. I think Audely is confounding politics with personalities. Audely wouldn't be human if he didn't feel a little *rancune*. He *did* write that letter, though I have no doubt he has by now quite got over his feeling for Venice. Still, no man enjoys seeing the girl he once wanted taken up, though ever so slightly, with another man.

The war has so altered values, as Audely says, that I must admit that even Percy has at least a millionth of a chance. I should never say even this except to you. The Family—the older members of it, at least, who have not thought to keep pace with modern thought and conditions—would half kill me if they imagined that I was not exerting all my powers to nip such a thing in the bud. And instead I have got him here! Henry would remove his support from Venice and take back her allowance, which certainly does come in most handy. . . .

But there is no need for him to hear of it. Percy may not offer: Venice may refuse him. If she doesn't—well, the deluge! Percy's prestige against Henry's beggarly allowance. And Venice's marriage: certainly a desideratum!

I cannot imagine a worse fate than for a woman not to marry. And Venice is not so young as she was. And Percy is well off in a way and has prospects, and isn't likely

to carry socialistic precepts into practice to the extent of not profiting by them.

We should, I expect, live together, and I should attend to the house as I do now. Percy and Venice would have all their time to devote to the good work, looking to the welfare of the people! Venice is incapable of housekeeping, and yet there is no one like her for detecting an unswept room or a carelessly cooked dinner. To see the face she makes when cook has not blanched her onions, and watch her draw her finger scornfully across a dusty table or bureau! She is the hammer of the housemaid.

The late slight difficulty in getting sugar has been a worry to me. I go all over the neighbourhood trying to scrape up a respectable quantity for her tea. She and Audely, too, are such sybarites, and like to see their sugar mount up over the top of the coffee-cup, and then eat it afterwards with a spoon.

I manage so well that I have a wretched feeling that as long as I am spared to make a home for her, and there are plenty of men or even one man at her feet, she will not want to go through the grind of marrying.

Percy would ask her in a moment if he were given the slightest encouragement and if he could be sure that I would throw my influence into the scale on his behalf, but I daren't let him think so, for even if I had made up my mind to give her to him, the psychological moment might not have arrived and he might propose and the silly child refuse him. These children at heart, who are given the power of life and death over themselves by being twenty-one, and who sometimes wreck their lives to show that they are old enough to know their own minds! Girls ought to be forced to bring every reasonable proposal before a *conseil de famille*, as they do in France when a *son* wants to bring a woman into the family. He has to ask leave, so why should not she? And Venice, though twenty-eight, is still a child. In some ways I do think she is even a case of arrested development: certainly she is, *re* passions. She simply hasn't got any. I believe she will be The White Snowdrop to the end—a pure flame, like a frosted gas-globe, that attracts the moths and burns them up and goes on shining! She is of the stuff of which vestal virgins that prophesy were made, and hasn't got an ounce of marrying fibre in her

I believe it is all the poetising that has done it. Constant dwelling on the emotions. She has been at it since her tenth year. I ought not to have allowed it. And if she marries, it will have to be a man without passions, like herself.

Unfortunately I am not sure that Percy is a man like that at all. I used once to get cross with Ida when she said Gerald said he was a fearfully passionate make. It seemed presuming, somehow, in a man of his class to be passionate, like a Minnesinger or a knight of old. But I am less arrogant since then, my dear, and I have come to admit that we can't have the monopoly of any characteristic, except perhaps that of breeding.

Thank God, they can't take that away from us!

Percy is bound to be made unhappy by Venice. Heartless people can always hurt heartfelt ones, I think. Even Audely hurts me, as I dare say you have guessed. He is always rubbing it in to me that he may be killed—*wants* to be killed in some moods; feels it in his bones in others; and so on! Just talk, but it positively rends me. . . .

I have grown fond of Percy, too, but in quite a different way. I do not want to see him suffer either. But of course my first duty is to Venice, and if I thought that she could find a heart's home in his love, a something to lean on, a semblance of the ardent spiritual union she covets for herself and that no man will ever give her, I believe it would be my duty to foster the affair and bring it to accomplishment.

Marriage does wonders. There's Ilsa, my whilom failure. She is as happy in it as she *can* be, with him out fighting. He threw over the air, goodness knows why! She has got a man of her own set and rank and position and fairly decent pay, and he is abjectly devoted to her. Truly, I think that text in the Bible has a great deal of truth in it: "There is more joy in heaven over the one that repenteth . . ." I had always considered it a most immoral pronouncement: rather like that other dreary one about "The last shall be first," which to my mind puts a premium on indolence and want of endeavour.

The dear old lazybones that was, is doing, with her husband's full permission, some war work that keeps her on her feet and out for twelve hours or so a day. She won't tell any of us what form the work takes, except that Archie

knows what she has gone in for and is all right about it. She says we may take it that it is neither derogatory nor degrading to the wife of a Dunkeron—that's all.

I rather suspect she is at a canteen for women-workers at Enfield, where they wanted help badly, so few women care to work for women only. It can't be T.N.T., for her complexion is as glorious as ever, if a little fresher, so one imagines it is some sort of out-o'-doors job. And she gets two pounds ten a week, and a uniform. She says we should not know her in it if we met her in the street. I said, Is it a job Venice could undertake? and she said, No, certainly not!



## XXIV

### *From The Lady Venice St. Remy*

EDWARDES SQUARE.

I HAVE engaged myself to be married ; you have heard this from Mother, of course. But Mother knows nothing of the terms, and isn't to. They are rather singular, and I want them, somehow or other, put on record. You, dear, out in America, seem so safe and distant. It would take you nearly a month from to-day for your protest to reach us. And anyway I know I can trust you not to butt in and make trouble with Mother and the relations, who would all be shocked to death if they realized the sort of arrangement I have made with Percy.

And if, which is unthinkable, Percy *should* begin to jib at them or any part of them, you will be able to support me by saying that I informed you of our pact and called you to witness of it beforehand.

It will be unnecessary. Percy is very good, and subject to my will, and sensible enough to see things as I see them with regard to our common life. I have brought him to agree with my theory—my knowledge indeed—that my own peculiar mentality does not fit me to be the conventional wife of the conventionally demanding man, which he is not. He is so untrained in any form of amorous commerce that he is *tabula rasa* for me to inscribe my laws on.

You must not be shocked when I say I am not fit to be the wife of any man. I don't mean that I want to reserve the right to run away, or get into mischief. Mr. Gregson and I haven't signed a paper with our blood, in the way boys and girls do now, pledging themselves not to be jealous or take each other into the divorce court. This sort of thing, although they think they are being strong and cynical, is merely a form of romance, and neither of us is romantic enough to indulge in whimsical blood-letting.

What I mean is, that I have come to see that I am incapable of falling in love. I shall always want to take more than I can give, and it is only a very exceptional man like Percy who could stand that—a man who feels that I am something more to him in other ways, as he does. Thank God my title is coming to be of some use at last. It is all I can bring my husband. He knows it. The prestige of it will mean a good deal to him in his work. I am sure he does not care for it from the ordinary snobbish point of view of a self-made man.

*Re* being in love, you will say, as people do to a stiff-necked generation of a girl like me: "Wait till you've *been* it!" Though I have never been and never shall be in love, I know what it is. I am not a poet for nothing. We poets have intuitions that stand us in lieu of experience. We can evolve for ourselves the whole paraphernalia, call up the whole gamut of passion from a chance turn of an eyebrow and a twist of a lip. . . . We can isolate the notion of Love so gained in our brains and see it clearly, in a vacuum. We need not let it ever go beyond our brains or form the delirious quantity in us that overthrows the reason and ruins us women through the self-decreed destruction of personal identity. I am sure I will not let it. But it might have happened so. The curse of Love might have descended on me. It is either my blessing or my curse that it didn't. It depends how you look at it.

I don't think many poets have both succumbed and been able to describe their madness. There is Tennyson and Sappho. I don't know about Tennyson, but Sappho made a bad business of love. They both can describe it better than any one, I think.

Now Eros shakes my soul, a wind on the mountain, shivering the oaks.

And Tennyson's Fatima :

Oh Love, Love, Love! Oh withering might! . . .

Last night, when some one spoke his name,  
From my swift blood that went and came  
A thousand little shafts of flame  
Were shivered in my narrow frame. . . .

That can never happen to me. My nerve channels are not constructed to carry messages of that kind. I know it.

And yet I shall describe it all from end to end. I am

going to make a name in poetry. Percy doesn't care for poetry: he thinks it an overrated mode of expression of a mood that is less important than people suppose, but he thinks I shall pull it off, having set my heart on it. He is sympathetic in the only real way, giving value to sensation in another, that he does not share. It is not two hearts beating as one, but two intelligences seeing fair, and giving each other room. . . .

I have never even been kissed. Not once in my life. Most girls of my age and my limited facilities have been—brief birdlike pecks behind doors, clumsy ill-adjusted hugs in sitting-out places at balls. I expect my long neck as well as my coldness has saved me from that. Girls are hustled into submitting to that sort of thing very often, I suspect, from shyness and shock; but I cannot imagine bending down to receive a kiss except with premeditation.

And the other kiss—the grave deep kiss of passion. . . . Percy might give me that if I wished I suppose; but I don't wish it, even as an experience. I shouldn't like him so well if I was not quite sure that there was no chance of it. The truth is, I cannot imagine myself wanting it from any one, not even Audely, and from him it would not outrage me so much. I am not quite immune from Audely, I do believe. It hurt me somehow all down my spine when I saw him kiss Ida on the platform that night when we saw him off for Fordingbridge. Jealousy—of Mother's Audely! Impossible! Yet I sometimes think if I were going to have a child, going through all that awful struggle, I should like Audely to be there holding my hand. . . .

I shall never have a child by the one man, so I can never make that outrageous demand on the other! . . . To kiss Percy would be like kissing a popular edition or a packet of grocery.

Laura, you can see by the way I am writing, that although I am sure that Percy is of my way of thinking in these matters, more or less—it is the "less" I am afraid of. I want to lay the whole notion of our alliance, its object, its motive, before you, so as to ensure your moral support supposing Percy should ever try to go back on it in ever so little. But he won't. I will not say he is a man of honour, but he is at least a man of his word.

He has a certain standing in romance for me, or I should not do this. Like Enjolras, my ideal hero in *Les Misérables*'

he puts Ambition before Love. Don't you remember, Enjolras was loved by Eponine, and when he is shot on the Paris barricade, he is murmuring the name of his mistress, "*Patrie!*"

The mistress of Percy is his Country. My lover, I suppose, is my Art.

You will say that it is a dreary look-out for us both. I don't think I shall find it so. Nature is enough for me, with the big window on life, which I command through my mundane sympathies.

I believe I am a prig. I know Mother's friends say so. There is something to be said for a prig who knows she is one.

Percy and I will do some good work together. He will supply the solid algebraic formulas, the theories which I shall popularize to the weaker vessels by my facile pen, presenting the romantic aspects of his propaganda. And perhaps, by thus giving myself, loveless, to the weal of my country, I shall be doing my bit as well as the "boys." My inadequacy in this respect has always hurt me. I have had to watch all the other girls, the clever ones as well as the able-bodied, working hard and good in the service of the nation; and in these days Milton's panacea for lazy people, the "standing and waiting," seems singularly ineffective. . . .

I have found that I cannot sew bandages, hoe turnips, milk cows, or act scullerymaid in hospitals. I have searched and found a new medium, and I am willing to surrender all the chances of my emotional life, so as to stand and serve at Percy's side.

Now I will stop being serious and begin to tell you about the things that *don't* matter. I suppose you realize that Mother has consented to my engagement with less fuss than I expected, at any rate with no positive opposition. Percy has a curiously effective cajoling way with him, and Mother is such a born flirt, and misses Audely so much in that capacity, that she can't resist any man who takes the trouble to put his head on one side in speaking to her. She has always all her life made the running, even with *my* lovers, and been more accessible to them than I could manage to be. And she is going to do my spade-work for me, as regards Percy's personal appearance and manners. She is going to persuade him to wear his hair shorter, and give him numberless little hints about how

not to behave in drawing-rooms. Percy has so much sense that he gives way in trifles always, and is polite enough to let Mother think that he is profusely grateful to her for taking an interest in him, his manners, and his appearance. I like this about him : it is strong.

So she cultivates a pleasant mirage that I may yet end as the wife of a People's Ambassador, or President of Labour. She has now got it well into her head that the Future of the world is with Democracy, and yet in her own procedure she is as reactionary as ever. She will go down on her knees to clear up any mess I may have made on the floor with papers or flower stalks or what not, to spare the perfectly indispensable servant, but she sent away that very servant the other day because the girl forgot to address her as My Lady. Percy was amused. He said she was cutting off her own nose to spite her own face, that she would get no better, only worse, as time went on, for Rudeness, not Terror, was the order of the day. It was surely preferable for aristocrats to be "cheeked" than to have their heads cut off, as in the recent Revolution in France. . . .

Percy in his relations with Mother amuses me. He is so nice to her, and so rude to her—just like Audely. It is the curse of all Mother's men. You see I am so used to Mother's monopolizing that I even call *my* Percy Mother's out of habit. Another time he told her she was a remarkable instance of the staying power of the old order which had enabled them to remain so long in the saddle and would still if we would only be careful. Then—*Plus ça changera, plus ça sera la même chose* he promised her in beautiful French with an English accent. He will have it that it is not incumbent on an Englishman to seek to acquire a French accent. A Frenchman doesn't pay us that compliment ; he thinks it enough for us if he makes himself understood. Percy is perfectly acquainted with idiomatic French and slang, although he has only been on the Continent once, for a month. It is a sign of his intense adaptability. Mother swaggers on his praise. I don't know if he means it as praise altogether. He says that she—that we are all extraordinary—we Last Ditchers ; that we haven't altered a gesture or a phrase or a convention. We have stuck to our elevated platform even though it is hollow underneath, with the proletariat crouching below working at their plots and mine-laying. Perhaps, he says, the plat-

form will never go ; it is of old and seasoned wood, and may prove strong enough to bear us up, supreme, on top of the welter. We are light, and our numbers so inconsiderable ! Our boys going out so bravely have saved us ; they gave the lead, as of old, and it will be counted unto us for righteousness.

Mother wept when he said that, and presently, recovering herself, remarked with her usual naïve frankness, as if she expected Percy to say, Thank You !—

“ And I am giving *you* my daughter.”

“ With your permission,” he replied, bowing, “ she descends from the platform, craning her long neck to this fellow in the cellarge.”

“ Perhaps it will be the other way ? ” Mother answered with spirit. “ Venice may succeed in pulling you up, and making you Prime Minister ! ”

But I don't myself think that Percy will ever be Prime Minister of England, though he is nearly clever enough to be anything he likes. He lives too fast, in the respectable sense ; he will be worn out long before he is thirty. He travels incessantly, doing the work of six men and thinking nothing of covering the British Isles in the course of a week.

And even if he lives, he hasn't got the presence ; he can't acquire it in the time. I'm not blind to that. Mother is. She doesn't know a gentleman when she sees him—out of her own class. She never did. She ought to have a cadometer fixed to her belt, Ida used to say in the old days, when she filled the house with modistes and photographers and Blackleys and so on, without an eye to their status in their own world. For there *are* shades.

Sometimes I think it is a pity she isn't going to marry Percy instead of me. I can see so plainly that his undeniable good looks are not the right sort of good looks ; there is too much of them, for one thing. They are too riotous, too popular. His opulent *chevelure* gives him away. There's a bit that sticks up in the middle. He doesn't brush it enough, poor dear ; he never has time, and doesn't care to make it. His face is too expressive for good form, not like Audely's blankness, which he wears habitually like a garment.

Audely accepts Percy and the engagement, too, in a wholesale way that irritates me. He came up on leave the other day and shook hands with my *fiancé*. Mother was eyeing him the while to see how he took it ! As if he

would let her or anybody see! Before he left that night he had offered Percy Brightsome Glen for the honeymoon. I *was* cross.

If Audely knew—and I would tell him if he asked me, only I never have a word with him alone—Percy and I are not going to have a honeymoon at all, though Percy was too flustered at the time to refuse the offer of one of his houses. We are going straight into our two flats in the same block, with opposite doors, so that we can close them to each other and live apart altogether the moment we feel the slightest desire to do so: which will be all the time, really, only I must not spring that on Percy, all at once. The canteen arrangements—dining-room and kitchen—will be on my side and the smoking-room and study will be on Percy's. He can ask his political friends—he has no others, poor dear!—in without reference to me and my likes and dislikes. Some of his friends that I have met are a little too—Pacifist for me! Two of them are conscientious objectors, of nineteen. One of them, Philip Champion, was a nice boy. He sat at my feet and imbibed correcter principles there. He enlisted, and got killed. It was a pity, as it has turned out, that I didn't leave him where he was, safe in Dartmoor.

With these people, it is just a case of Mary and Martha, Percy says, whether a man chooses to be one or the other. The Marys are the romanticists who seek to gratify man's universal desire, next to Love, of going out with a weapon and downing something or other. The Marthas stay at home and look after the house, clear up the morals and wash the feet and heads of the next generation. Percy doesn't object to either choice; but what he *does* think wrong is Jimmy Fairs, on the Dover Patrol, keeping Mother in whisky, for which she pays no duty, and other sly little services which she is always getting people to perform for her.

It is no use Percy fulminating; he won't cure my Mother of her ruling passion for acquiring, at a slight reduction, no matter what article, or how little. And she is great at using influence. She visits the War Office very often. She is trying, I believe, to tamper with Audely's future as a soldier. Her object is to keep him from "Going out." On the other hand, he uses influence to be dispatched quickly, and renders her efforts, such as they are, null. Poor Mother! He will be going soon. . . .

We have been twice to see him at Hart-le-Pool—Mother, Ilsa, and I. There was a dance given for the officers. To see Audely solemnly dancing the fox-trot was almost too much for me! Yet I realized that my Percy could not have done it; he could never have carried it off. Audely dances just because it is the thing for an officer to do; he forces himself to perform tasks and go to places that would have bored him to death in the old days! He attends stock-company performances at the local theatres, sees stale musical revues with pleasure, and hums the tunes all day, and gives suppers to the little underpaid roving actresses. He does everything soldiers do but flirt, so far as I could see, and perhaps he does that too?

He gave Mother a lucky bean some girl had sent him for a Christmas present, and one day Mother picked a grey handkerchief, embroidered "Daisy" in pink, out of the pocket of his British warm, and a couple of left-hand gloves. How Ilsa teased him!

"She was crying her heart out on your shoulder, I suppose!" she said.

"No, I borrowed it from Daisy Dear because I had a cold," Audely said. "I always have a cold and I never have a handkerchief. Look, here is another gage."

The handkerchief he took out of the pocket of his tunic had a coronet on it. Mother suggested that she should collect them and have them washed and sent to the respective owners. Audely said she could do as she liked, but what was she going to do with the two left-hand gloves? and as for the lucky bean he begged her to stick to it.



## XXV

### *From The Lady Arles*

EDWARDES SQUARE.

MY DEAR, DEAR LAURA,—Excuse incoherence; events have moved with such frightful rapidity that I scarcely know if I am standing on my head or my heels. Minor bombs have fallen quite enough to excite one ordinarily, but Venice's affairs make all others seem negligible. I can hardly spell. Is that word right?

She broke off her engagement with Percy Gregson yesterday morning after a frightful scene in the studio, and married Audely that night at nine o'clock. And Audely has gone to the Front. And Ilsa—— But I will try to tell you events in their sequence, and more or less how they happened, but I find it difficult, for it was all in a sort of lightning flash, like thunder out of a clear sky, or a bomb at the new moon, to take an illustration from the prevailing time. It was certainly as dramatic as even Venice could have wished, but a little hard on the elders, as you will see when I have arranged my recollections a little. . . .

All the actors in the drama were here overnight. Percy as usual, and Audely, on last leave. Bomb No. one. He was very solemn and self-contained about it, so as not to upset me, I supposed; but I think he might have let me know he was in town before the very last day or so. Just like him, the darling! We were all discussing Venice's article on War Babies. She had been asked by the *Daily Error* to give her views on the subject, and had accepted. She undertakes to write on such queer things nowadays—subjects that I personally don't quite consider even an engaged girl ought to take up. But Percy permits—nay, he encourages her. She had written the article and was rather proud of it, and had given it to Audely to read over before it went in. He was chaffing her for the view she took. That was

left, to me, rather obscure, but it would seem that, instead of condemning the mothers, she considers it their bounden duty to go on doing it for the good of the nation. So, while Percy said it was a remarkable article for a young girl to write, I thought it was rather a remarkable view for a young girl to take. Though I suppose if it is really her conviction, it was plucky of her to write it and trust to her title, as well as her eloquence, to give it vogue among the common herd. But I disliked the idea myself of her being mixed up with that problem very much. I don't see that it is a *young* girl's place to take these sort of bulls by the horns in the public press. However, she was in Percy's charge, *then!* . . .

What she advocated was that no brave soldier should go from these shores without leaving a child to take his place when he is killed. It possibly touched Audely a bit on the raw, for at that time he certainly didn't seem to be arranging for anything of the kind. . . .

I wondered if that was why he took such pains to impress the fact on her, and incidentally on us all, that there *were* no war babies, and that it was only a mare's nest of some politician trying to get up a sensation in the House?

Though he said this for effect, he was, I do believe, in his heart of hearts, rather struck with Venice's notion. . . . Audely is always to be reached on his altruistic side. He has the soul of a reformer. . . .

He handed her back the article, said it was very well written, and that it was as good a shriek as another for the *Error*. Then he changed the subject, delivering bomb the second.

He remarked, and when pressed he swore, that he had just met Ilsa on the footboard of a "London General," and that she had taken twopence-halfpenny "off him" that very day. He will have it that my daughter—looking more like a "Venetian Bead" than ever—was standing on the footboard as conductor, saying, "Pass along the car, please!" with her old drawl that used to be so effective in drawing-rooms and now had the power of making all the people do as she said and not all crowd near the door. And that though she had most of her yellow hair tucked away under a hideous cap, she wore his pendant thing dangling over the front of her dark blue coat and skirt, piped with white.

He described her uniform to me carefully. I've hardly

ever seen these girls; I can't stand a bus nowadays—so full! and would rather walk, any day—so that accounts for my never coming across her and being so long kept in ignorance of her goings on—as usual! Her present profession, though perhaps more respectable than the last, constitutes an extremely unpleasant problem for her relations. She is relying on the fact that we don't frequent her low haunts, and shall not find her out any more than we did before. It has been going on a long time. She was good enough to communicate this item of news to Audely once when she passed him, in the course of the business of collecting dirty pennies from all and sundry. Thank God, Henry doesn't go in omnibuses!

Audely thought it splendid of her, and so did Percy. Of course Percy would, but Audely was only saying it to annoy me. And I firmly believe it was the hearing of how Ilsa had let herself down that made Percy think he had the right to presume with Ilsa's sister, and attempt to break through what she calls "The Brynhild's curtain of fire."

That's all she will tell me, dragging in some mythological tag out of the Edda, which I have never read, and don't see the relevance of.

But the bald fact is she suddenly felt she could not go through with it. She admits as much as that in plain English. I can't in the least imagine what Percy did to offend her; but there it is.

I have an idea—take it for what it is worth—that it was the reality of all Audely's self-sacrifice, the result of his self-imposed task, the culmination of his endeavour presented to her, face to face, when he came in announcing that he was actually "going out," which worked in her. Never tell me! The girl has married him; she must have some feeling for him, and surely had, even before that night! His news upset me dreadfully, only I have never time or licence now to think of myself. But the news seemed to me to shut out the sun. . . .

I know I never slept a wink that night. Venice did; I heard her. But she always could sleep, even from a child, however much she was upset. . . . I kept her a baby so long, and she is it still. . . . absolutely untouched by Life.

Audely had left us that night, saying that he could not make any appointment with us for the next day, that he had to get a telescope and a revolver and be photo graphed and

a prismatic something or other, whose name I wrote down on a card, so forgot. He said he would probably have to tear all over London for it, they were getting so scarce. As a matter of fact, he had two of them in the end, for I managed to pick one up in the course of the morning, running about on Audely's business, while he and Venice were getting themselves engaged at the London Library. He asked us if we would see him off at Waterloo on the Friday morning at twelve, if he didn't manage to get out to us on the Thursday night, to say good-bye! Venice agreed with rapture; she said she loved seeing soldiers off. I, knowing I should blubber, told Audely it was possible I might have to let her go alone to Waterloo.

He said: "You're the one I want, Beauty!"

I remember this speech in the light of what happened afterwards. It seems strange, and yet so like Audely, with his old grudging dole of affection. And then later, when he said, looking embarrassed—for Audely—that he had an appointment at the York Hotel—some one he must see—it came all over me that this person he was so awfully keen on bidding good-bye to must be a woman: the lady from Madrid, come over, on purpose, at the risk of her life!

His strange new tenderness towards me, his keenness to see the Spanish lady, even his marriage with Venice, are all compatible with straightness, in Audely, though it would not be in any other man. It has to be taken in conjunction with the fact that he is capable of any sort of *supercherie*—tactlessness, shall we call it?—where women are concerned. He seems to forget that he is a man, and though *he* mayn't take love relationships seriously, *they* are apt to do so. He himself values friendship and communion so much more highly than Love, while finding their tenderness, and lots of it, an indispensable extra. Passion is inconvenient and devastating, but he gives it half an hour at the York Hotel . . . and posts off to marry Venice, who won't, can't give it him, though he thinks she will, as well as the other things that she is quite good for. So he is all the time riding for a fall, poor Audely! This is how I read him—a simple, not a complex character, that I love. And though I say it who shouldn't, it is merely the average selfish man's ideal, boldly expressed by a man who has sufficient prestige to carry it off—temporarily, at least.

It explains his letter to Venice and his whiff of passion

for her. It makes him able to give up anything—like the love of Venice—which he did then, to come on again later. I dare say, just when he wrote to Venice, circumstances were parting him unavoidably from the lady in Madrid, and he was uncertain whether he should ever see her again. So he took up something else.

Audely's is quite a different nature from Percy's, and one, I fancy, a good deal more suitable to my daughter. Things are, perhaps, for the best. Audely as usual will fall soft. . . . He will have a mother-in-law that he is able to get on with, and even like. . . . And I dare say, later on, when the war is over and if he comes back, he will pick up the lady in Madrid again too. There is no impropriety in that, the way Audely conducts love affairs. So we shall all be back where we were. . . .

Audely kissed me that night in the porch as he went away. I suppose, being literal, he took it that I meant what I said, and should not be on the platform on Friday. I felt it was Good-bye, even if I did take my courage in both hands when the time came and go and see him off in a crowd. I took off my little medallion I always wear, next my skin, and gave it him for a fetish. I knew he was sure to lose it, which made the gift of it still more of a sacrifice. But I thought it was dear of him to grant me some sort of sentimental leave-taking, in the dark, under the fanlight . . . where my age didn't show. . . . One knows he doesn't, himself, care for occasions of any kind, so the concession on his part was the more valuable.

And so ended the romance of half a lifetime !

Next morning Percy and I breakfasted together as usual. Venice had a tray in her room, which she sent down untasted, but at ten she had three pennyworth of cream and a glass of port. She often has no more than that. Then she got up and sauntered down to the studio. Percy, who was just off to address a meeting at Bermondsey, watched her go out and folded up his papers and went down the garden after her, bareheaded, though it was raining.

The next thing I heard was the clatter in the hall of him taking his umbrella out of the stand and reaching down his bowler so that it tumbled down among a lot of other things upon the floor, and then the door banged. . . . I looked into the hall the moment after he had gone and saw that he hadn't taken his umbrella after all, nor his hat. I didn't

think much of that. Percy is erratic, and I have known him go out without a hat often enough, especially in the early days of his stay with us when he knew no better, only I didn't see why he should have been at the trouble to take the things down if he wasn't going to use them. So I walked straight down to the studio to see how Venice was getting on. It could only have been a minute or so after Percy had left the house.

Venice was standing against the Rowley-Deane—she often does; people have told her that it forms an ideal background for her—and for once she didn't look in the least like a white snowdrop. All the blood in her body seemed to have got up into her cheeks.

She gave a jump when she saw me come in and said, quickly:

“Mother, don't make a scene. I'm not going to marry Percy.”

I said indignantly that I shouldn't think of making a scene, but that she might as well collect herself and tell me what had happened. Not that she was excited, except her looks. My dear Laura, the child might have had lockjaw for all she would open her mouth and tell me a thing. She annoyed me greatly; she somehow or other gave me to understand that this was her room, and that I had better get out of it and leave her alone. I kept on saying helplessly:

“But if it is true, it alters all sorts of household arrangements. He won't want to . . . It is very awkward, not knowing—Tinkler.”

Then she did say, in an off-hand uncivil sort of way:

“Tinkler needn't trouble to make his bed, if that is what you mean.”

I couldn't stand it, and left her. It was what she wanted. Not another word of explanation did I get from her. By and by I heard her wander upstairs, and presently she went past the dining-room windows and out of the gate, swearing under her breath when the latch stuck, as it often does. She was in her coat and hat, but she had, as far as I could see, no gloves. . .

A peer's daughter—rambling about London streets like that! . . . Something very serious had happened.

She never even turned up for luncheon. I was wild with apprehension. I think without comparison it was the most miserable day I had ever spent. And towards evening I

remembered my social duties. I had people coming to dinner. The Quains were dining with us and Rowley Deane. I telephoned and tried to put him off, but did not succeed in finding him at any of his addresses. I had to let that go. As for Gerald and Ida, I did not seek to put them off coming, they are always so helpful. I thought that if anything they might ease the situation.

They are all telling me now what an owl I was; that they telephoned the news, so as to spare me the shock. . . . But I got all of the shock, if shock there was, for though I do remember Venice getting me up and saying something and even answering her—All right!—I swear I didn't take in what she said. People often mumble when they are saying something that they are not exactly ashamed of, but which they know will be a bomb.

So I looked every sort of fool when at about six o'clock Venice and Audely turned up together, both as cool as cucumbers, and told me their news. I seemed suddenly to go a little deaf, but Audely was most kind and patient and patted my shoulder as if I had hiccough, to make my hearing come back. He said he had got a special licence, and that they'd been round to Mr. Anstruther, our Vicar here whom we have never troubled before, and got him to promise to marry them that evening at nine o'clock. That was what had taken the time. I can't understand, though, how Audely can have got the licence signed and endorsed and filled in by the different people in the rest of the time, but he is a wonderful fellow. They had met in the course of that morning, quite by accident, Venice told me; had lunched together and gone about all the afternoon seeing to things, even sandwiching a visit to a picture gallery and a tailor in between.

She would tell me no more, but I have no right to say she was sulky. Just her own usual, simple, childish manner as if nothing had happened, and if it had, it wouldn't matter. The manner I have always held up to people as perfect—the grand manner, as one might say, that rebuts impertinence and permits of no liberties to be taken while remaining absolutely polite. But turned against her own mother it is rather irritating. She has so much character that it is paralysing. . . . Well, she is Venice Magdalen Bar now, and more *posée* than ever. My occupation is gone, Laura. . . .

Audely slept here. I had to get Percy's bed ready for him at a moment's notice. Luckily, Percy had sent a man for his things in the early part of the afternoon, and later a female clerk with a little note saying he would so much like to see me, and would I lunch with him at the National Liberal Club to-morrow—the day Audely was to go—and he would tell me what had happened. He had no quarrel with my daughter, who had behaved exceedingly well all through a difficult situation, but he would be glad if I would get the engagement ring from her and bring it with me when I came, as he hoped I should. I had always been so kind to him . . . and so on. . . .

I accepted. I was glad of an excuse not to go to Waterloo to see Audely off to France.



## XXVI

### *From The Lady Venice Bar*

EDWARDES SQUARE.

You were right, my Laura, he broke the compact. I won't say broke it badly, but enough to show me where I stood and the way we were going . . . I am glad. And Audely is for something in it, too. . . .

Poor Mother is puzzled and worried, in the nature of things. She didn't know of the compact, so there seems to her no valid reason for my throwing Percy over except caprice, and she would have liked me to have a better reason than that, for the honour of the family, and also because she had come to like Percy, and now considers that he has been, in her North-country lingo, "ill done to."

Yet for many reasons I don't mean to tell her the rights of it all, and I have forbidden Audely to do so, though indeed there is not much chance of his being indiscreet; he would hardly think of writing such trivialities from France, where he is now for the first time as a soldier, and isn't he pleased? He sees war, for the present, all *couleur de rose*. Let us hope it will never get any redder—for him—although he desperately hopes it will. Fancy a man wanting earnestly to be damaged! He says he doesn't in the least object to losing a leg or an arm, or even an eye: he is extraordinarily patient of physical ills. It is his make. I, on the other hand, am quite sure that he will not be killed, and it is lovely having a husband in France that you are certain won't come to grief, and who doesn't expect to be written to every day, or even every week. If he did, you would be cut off, Laura, for I mean to be a good wife in that particular, and I am not equal to more than one long screed like this per week.

The sending off of Audely, therefore, was quite an occasion. It was rather like a public reception, but not nearly

so dull, and no red baize. Me, still, serene, and dignified, a tall, proper *figure de circonstance*. Audely, gay and debonair, introducing me to all his friends and the nicest officers, rushing about the platform in a way he never did in his life before, here, there, and everywhere, like an active host at a tea-party. It was slightly *déplacé*, but then, Audely is Audely, and would distort the course of the seasons to fit in with his own arrangements. I'm not sure the more serious officers liked it—those with women, wives and mothers, that they hadn't liked to bring on to the platform lest they cried and made the other officers inclined to grouse about going. And Mother did certainly object to Audely's attitude; she said that she would have preferred to see him a little more serious, and spending his last moments on English soil quietly by the side of his wife and his mother-in-law, and not bother about a lot of men we might never see again, but that he would see plenty of on the other side. . . . She even wished she hadn't broken her appointment with my "ex," to come. . . .

However, when it came to the last few minutes she wept right enough, but very quietly under her veil, which Ilsa had persuaded her to wear for once. Ilsa couldn't get away from her work to join Audeley's farewell beano, she said. . . .

I had been very wary, and had got Audely to make me promise not to show feeling, in case, when it came to the point, I had none to show. I did have, more than I expected, but found no difficulty in concealing it. And though Audely found time to whisper to me, dramatically, "Danton, no weakness!" I believe he would have liked it, perhaps, better, or as well, as the tears of a mother-in-law, although to my thinking they constitute a far greater compliment. . . .

One must not forget that up to now Audely has been Mother's property, not mine. I believe she loves him better than any one—more than I do, and I think him rather a dear! And when he kissed me, just before he got in, he was in such a hurry, and so excited, that his farewell kiss lighted on my ear!

The previous getting rid of Percy was rather awful. I felt so mean, so childish in the wrong. That is what happens when a calculated attitude, founded on some purely physical prejudice, is upset by the attitude of the other party, which one hasn't taken sufficiently into account.

The natural man is bound to react against unnatural repressions some time or other. I don't believe Percy ever took any stock in my theory of our union. It never would have been a union. Talk of the Unmarried Mother in my article, I meant, I suppose, to be the Unmother Married! I made the mistake of thinking that Percy was as quixotic and singular as myself. He is just an *homme moyen sensuel*, after all, and I dare say if Audely had not been whisked away from me by the war, I should have found him out too! But the Germans have settled that and smoothed my path for me. Percy, a forced civilian with his work cut out for him here, would have been on my bones, right from that very minute! It was lucky for him we found each other out in time, for he is the kind of fool that suffers...

It was a near thing. The day of the break with Percy was also the day of my marriage with Audely. It all "came" pretty well, if one was out for romance. It might really have been engineered, from beginning to end, for a sensational series in a novel or film. But I didn't arrange it. It was all pure accident, though the chain of events that ended in Kensington Church was certainly laid from the moment I walked into the London Library, in a half-dazed condition after the scene with Percy, to steady myself by reading the lighter magazines. Isn't it funny, the moment you consciously try to dramatize your effects, they are sure to fall out prosaically, whereas, if you let them alone, the great coups of Life are brought about by a power not ourselves which works histrionically or prosaically, in patches. Look at Mother and her tragedy! Ida dripping in the bathroom, the slavey, Mother's hat all awry, and Audely to go into the Army! For you may say what you like, that was Mother's supreme moment, and she was fairly ridiculous. And Audely, her passion, married me without one.

He took me by my romantic side. The catch about the licence—ready in his pocket. . . . I believe I had a sort of subconscious idea that I was sneaking him from the Spanish lady, for whom he had really obtained it. . . . He will never tell me. I shall never ask him. That is really why he has married me. . . . I am restful . . . and perplexing . . . that is where my dramatic tastes have taken refuge. . . .

That cold, rainy morning, at nine of the clock, Percy broke his solemn covenant, after being as good as gold, poor little man, for three months—the time our engagement lasted. Well, he gave me a very good time, of a sort; introduced me to ideas to which without him I should ever have remained a stranger. He was an illuminating personality, a genius almost in his way, and my association with him will be of immense use to me in my career. Audely, who doesn't condescend to be jealous of a mere civilian, agrees with me. I want you to understand that I am not blaming Percy. One must not expect men of that stamp to uphold an intrinsically futile contract, to keep an engagement to do something absurd.

But I wonder, often, what determined his action? Why for some reason or other suddenly did his promise begin to irk him, so that he turned its inception over in his mind, brought his common sense to bear on it, and found it vain? I believe it was jealousy—unconscious; but still jealousy. We had been making a tremendous fuss about Audely the evening before, hanging—all of us, including Mother, Percy's stand-by and chief rampart—on his very words, watching him, the way people always do when it is a case of Last Leave and a man is going out, perhaps to be killed! . . .

Even Ilsa was soft and tremulous about him, and she has lately grown as hard as nails. Ida frankly adores him. I felt it nearly as much as the others, and I never hide my feelings, either of dislike or interest. So I was awfully nice to Audely, quite "soppy" as they say—*accaparante*, which sounds better. Audely lapped up the adulation as if it was his due. He looked so happy and boyish and shy. People stripped off baubles and gave them to him as fetishes. . . .

Percy was left out, and he does not like that, because he is an egotist too.

As for Mother, she sat there nearly all the time with tears in her eyes. That must have added to Percy's irritation. All my men get so keen on my mother, they cherish her like a mistress and go to her for the tenderness they don't get from me. I suppose her type, motherly, sentimental, and rather overblown, appeals to them, while the possession of the poor pale snowdrop merely flatters their vanity. Then, Percy's weak heart, which forces him, whether he likes it or not, to remain a civilian, makes him touchy. Audely gasses about the Army a good deal, and has a supreme

contempt for the civilian he was himself a year ago, which makes civilians hate him.

So I suppose, sitting there, a mere listener, absolutely left out, it came across the poor man's mind that Audely was monopolizing more than his share of attention, and that I was, at least technically, his property.

I gather that he went to bed and slept on it, and woke up to realize that he wasn't done with Audely: that the gallant Second Lieutenant was coming again to say Good-bye, and that the family would be all over him, and that I should probably give him a last kiss to speed him on *that* trail. . . .

Some little naughty maggot of reprisal gnawed away in his brain and prompted him to follow me into my study, where I always go after breakfast.

You see, as I do, it was partly my fault. I was considerably taken by surprise, but I thought it all out while he had me in his arms, hugging me and stifling me with the smell of his rough, home-made Harris tweeds, just as if I had been the barmaid who is his proper complement. . . .

He has it against me now that I didn't stop him or make any fuss of pushing him away or struggling. I knew, you see, that it was to be his first and last kiss, and I let him fulfil the measure of his iniquity, and take the embrace in full. . . .

You will say, I suppose, that I wanted to see what even a Socialist's kiss was like ?

If he had more tact and had wanted me as much as his embrace seemed to mean, he should have seen that a little resistance on my part would have been far more propitious for him. And, too, if he had only been gentle, had not thumped and bumped his mouth against mine till I began to think he would end by wearing the skin off, down to the bone, I might not have cut him off so short: I should have let him down easier.

But it was the kiss of passion, so called. . . . His passion, Laura !

When he had done he would have been vexed to know that I felt just like a rat who has been set upon by a dog and nipped in the back. I said :

"Percy, I can never be married to you in this world."

I don't think I put it forcibly enough, for him; he didn't believe I meant it, at first. He said all the usual things, and

I let him say them; asked all the usual questions, and I didn't answer them. Then he asked me more gently, if his kiss had revolted me?

I thought a bit, and then said No to that, for it hadn't, exactly: it had merely hurt and instructed me. Also I didn't want to say something that would sting him when he remembered it his whole life long. That was because he isn't of my class; I shouldn't have bothered about telling Audely what happened to be true, or any one who was my equal.

He couldn't see that. And one couldn't expect him to.

"Well, then, why? . . ." he kept on saying, pathetically. . . . Because I had managed to be patient under his embrace, he at once set it down to complaisance; as a sign of my ultimate yielding; that I rather liked it, in fact. He very nearly said so. Then in despair, and rather tired of sparing his coarse feelings, I got to big words, and pointed out that he had broken his promise. . . .

"Pooh!" he said. "Hundreds of girls make that stipulation, and would be awfully annoyed if you didn't brush it aside!"

I still kept my temper, and he began to have the glimmering of an idea that I meant it. His face changed, he pouted, he got cross, he began to show the cloven hoof—several cloven hoofs. He walked away from me to the picture and shook his fist at it. . . .

"That beastly daub has infected you—got right into your system. That damnable art quackery is to blame for this and many other things. . . ."

I said, "The war, perhaps?"

"Yes," he agreed, falling into my trap. "Certainly it has, the spirit of it. Mad, grotesque, a symptom of the unrest, the morbidity and unhealthiness which has brought these things to pass. . . ."

He was beginning to talk like a leading article, and I left him, going towards the end of the room nearest the door, in the hope that I might slip out presently and end these futilities. But he saw my move, and thought I thought he was going to try to kiss me again—perhaps that I was not averse to a renewed experience of his ardour? . . .

"Oh, you needn't be afraid, I'm not going to," the cad said. "I haven't the slightest intention of wasting any more time on any one so silly and offensive. I have too

much to do, to go spending the nation's time dancing attendance on a saucy aristocrat like you, and I'm going to quit—d'you hear, my dear? I shall be obliged if you will send me back the engagement ring in a parcel, registered—no; please don't give it me now. I prefer that there should be some record in *your* handwriting of our recent viva-voce conversation."

Adding: "And I *have* kissed you, you know!" He walked out of the studio with some dignity, and I stood still, rather shaken by the impact of so much popular rhetoric.

Mother came in, all eyes, before I could get really calm.

I told her in a few words what had happened, and handed her the gimcrack ring Percy had bought me in the Strand, and asked her to send it on to him for me. A letter from her will do for the Minute he mentioned, and I am incapable of doing up parcels so that they do not come untied in the post. Then, to avoid more talk, I put on my hat and coat and went out of the house.

I had nowhere particular to go and I didn't much want to see anybody. I wandered about the streets looking into shop windows and talking to dogs. I got vaguely into a bus, and out again just as vaguely without paying my fare. I stood in the road and waved a penny, but the girl was on top and couldn't stop. These lady conductors must lose a lot in fines. About midday I was very footsore, and strolled into the London Library to read the papers and rest.

There I ran into Audely, pince-nez-ing about by the row of foreign books. It just occurred to me how cross Mother would be if she knew that he had had time for that and was not perhaps going to see her again. But it was just like him. . . .

It was an immense relief to see him and find that he *hadn't* time to sit down with me on the long padded seat thing in the middle, between the two book counters, but made it. There we sat, amid the coming and going of subscribers and footmen with books. Have you ever noticed, if a seat is very low, how removed you become from the people standing up? We seemed alone on a submerged island.

After the vulgar noisy scene I had gone through that morning it was like Manna dropping from Heaven to listen to Audely's gentle balanced voice. I was rather proud

that he should saunter through his last day in England with me, letting everything, seemingly, go by the board; so I just half shut my eyes and didn't talk much, and enjoyed myself as I have never done in my life, except once when we were on the yacht and had had a fearful tossing just outside Dieppe, waiting to get the pilot on board, who then took us quickly into harbour. Then the smoothness, the calm swish into port! . . .

Audely was as quietly mad as ever, and that seemed to suit me so well after Percy's damned prosaicness and fussy attention to other people's convenience, which being punctual is. Audely, though the heavens might fall, would calmly approach the central conflagration and light his cigarette at it. It was a divine contrast to Percy's Early Victorian fireworks coming down like a stick, *i.e.* a demand for the return of a cheap engagement ring. . . .

Presently, when we had talked over that new book of James's, I told Audely what had happened. He said simply: "I knew that you would never be able to stick him," and became thoughtful.

Presently, when I supposed he had had time to think it out, I said,

"Why?"

He said, "Well, for one thing he cares for you, too much; and what *you* want is some one who admires you, rather!"

I pretended to demur at that, although I am beginning to think it is true. And Audely went on:

"You would have made the poor beggar very miserable, just as Donne's mistress made him. So he dissected her.

"Yet I found something like a heart,  
It was not good, it was not bad,  
But colours it, and corners, had." . . .

While he quoted I remembered that conversation we had over the cookery in Park Crescent, which Audely had surely forgotten. He told me then that I did not possess a heart at all. Now it is "something like a heart." That's better. And yet the wildest longing came over me to drive him to say something tender to me: the kind of thing people say to women who are supposed to have the usual feelings. It couldn't hurt him, for he was going, and it would please me and give me something to think about. I said as archly as I could—I'm never arch except for a purpose:



"You haven't much of one either, my dear."

"So we are a pair of us," he answered, so off-handedly that I felt pushed miles away. . . . There was no more to be done, this time . . . and there would be no more times, as he was going! . . .

I waited a few minutes till I could command my voice, and then asked him to take me somewhere for luncheon. He refused, saying that he was far too busy; that he'd been all over the place that morning and done very little to show for it. They had kept him waiting at Doctors' Commons a good hour and a half. . . .

I couldn't quite remember what they do for you at Doctors' Commons, and I said, "What on earth took you there?" Audely looked really disturbed and puzzled for a moment. . . .

"Well . . ."—he always begins a sentence in that way when he wants to gain time—"Well. . . . Your article, the one we were discussing last night, has worked a good deal in my mind. . . . I suppose . . . going out for the first time and all that. . . . And I came to the conclusion that it would perhaps be a pity . . . I might conceivably be killed and leave no heir. . . ."

I began faintly to see where Doctors' Commons came in, but I chose, still, to say that I didn't. Then he drawled:

"I suppose I am quite mad . . . but I thought if I could come across some nice girl who'd consent to marry me on the spur of the moment, like this, I'd ask her. It would be Fate. . . . I owe it to my country to try, anyway. Any fit man, you said. . . . And a special licence only costs fifty pounds, so that if I'm killed your mother will have just that much less."

I said it was very nice of him to be going to leave his money to Mother, and she'd be glad; but I pointed out to him that if he did find a nice girl and married her, his previous will wouldn't stand—I do know that—and Mother not get a penny.

He said:

"Not if she was you?"

Then, Laura, he began a long sleepy persuasive peroration, a sort of endless chain of argument, from which I seemed to gather that he didn't really want anything much, except perhaps the good of his country. . . . But if I looked at it clearly I would see that I might as well help . . . that we were what is called a good match . . . that

what I wanted surely was a husband who would go away at once after the ceremony—church door business—*sans rancune*! That he might get killed out in France; and anyhow he would not bother me with love making when he did come back. . . .

Now he had come to think of it, it was the most sensible thing we could do, and would make up to Mother for the loss of my chance of being the wife of the Prime Minister of England. And growing still more urgent, because I wasn't saying anything, he admitted that he himself had really come to want it, for all sorts of reasons that were now crowding into his mind; that he wouldn't insult me by saying he loved me after the contemptuous way he had spoken of the tender passion, but that he really did care for me quite an enormous amount . . . and that the licence was burning his pocket . . . it was a pity it should be wasted. . . .

Audely invents emotions as he goes along and then firmly believes that he is moved by them. I didn't believe in the licence for one thing, Audely is such a liar!

I said—and I believe I got quite red with nervousness, which is the one thing I need to make me a little attractive, so he told me afterwards:

“Look here, I don't believe you have got any licence in your pocket; but if you really have, and produce it this minute, I'll marry you.”

My heart was in my mouth the moment I had said it and saw his hand slipped into the brown flap pocket in his tunic. I don't know even now if then I wanted the licence to be there? But it was, and I couldn't go back on my word. . . .

We were still sitting in the middle of the library. . . .

“Now let's go and buy you a nice ring,” Audely said, as if to a child. “I saw a gorgeous Alexandrite—green by day, red by night—in a shop as I came along here.”

So we got up off that old seat an engaged couple, trying to feel the same as before and look it, which we weren't. At least I wasn't. As we went out I pushed the door that said “*Pull!*” and Audely chaffed me, saying that that was what women always did all through life. It was typical. Going along St. James's Street, he chuckled, and I so far forgot myself as to ask him why—one never should ask Audely to give a reason for anything he does—and he replied, like the sincere beast he is:

"I was laughing at the idea of your turning down poor Percy just for making love to you, and then taking me on the wave of the War Babies Scare."

Rather cryptic, luckily, but I saw what he meant. I let that question be. And—well, circumstances alter cases. . . .

We lunched together at his club, and it was there that I asked him my first favour. It is a matter of some importance to me that my people—especially Mother—shouldn't be able to say that I simply gave in the moment he mentioned marriage, like the flapper brides who marry for the allowance; or out of war fever, because he is going out; or out of intemperate desires, like the beautiful Miss Gunning, who was married with a ring of the bed-curtain at midnight.

I said he was to let Mother think that he had cared for me for some time; that all this wasn't quite sudden; that once he had written about his feelings to me, confessing, however, to an entanglement with some other woman with whom he had got mixed up.

He jibbed a good deal, saying, "But I wasn't, I didn't, I never wrote to you!" Audely denies everything nearly on the face of it at first, so that doesn't upset me, only I was so keen on his attending to me and carrying out my plan that I had to work the Spanish lady Ilsa always told us about, and pretend to be jealous of her, taxing him with having her here with him in London, at the York Hotel—of having actually bought the licence for her!

"Nonsense," Audely said, speaking clearly and loudly for once. "There is no woman in London at this moment that I care for except you."

This was explicit enough for him. But I, knowing that it was the only way to drive it into his head that he was to make Mother understand that this was no new thing, kept on repeating: "Oh, but there *was* a lady in Madrid." . . . And he kept on repeating:

"There was *not*." He finally added: "And if there was, I wasn't in love with her, or you, or anybody, not even your mother, this time last year."

I said, very quietly:

"You have got to pretend you were, then, or I won't marry you."

I think, though Audely blusters, he will give in, because

he realizes how it will hurt my pride to have people think me such an easy conquest.

We had almost forgotten that he was still going to-morrow and that it behoved us to get ourselves married some time in the course of the day that was already half spent. We 'phoned Mother and parted, for the time, arranging to meet again about five at Edwardes Square, after he had been to call on the Vicar of our parish and make an appointment for him to marry us some time that evening. I said, Did he really think he could pull it off? and he said Yes, he thought so, sometime that evening; but if it was like Miss Gunning's wedding, an hour or so after midnight, I must not complain in war time. Audely's optimism is infectious. I left him, feeling that he would constrain the Reverend Mr. — I don't know his name, even—to perform his will.

Audely was right. The Vicar appointed us to meet him in Kensington Church at nine o'clock.

Rowley Deane and the Quains were dining with us, and Mother was in an awful state because she couldn't get at any of them by 'phone to put them off. I didn't see why, and it was lucky she didn't, after all. Ilsa couldn't get off duty; and though Mother telephoned wildly for Uncle Henry to come and give me away—as it was Audely, he would surely have stretched a point and come, Aunt Minna or no Aunt Minna—but she could not get on to him at all. So Ida had to be my bridesmaid and Gerald had to give me away. Mother ought to have, but at the last minute she did a little faint, and we had to leave her to Tinkler. It was only excitement, whether at the notion of my being married, or Audely, I never could discover. A little of both, I suspect.

It was a wonderful scene. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. It was worth marrying for, even if there was nothing else. The church, economically lit, and the shocking bad architecture dignified by the dimness, and furtive figures lurking behind the round, solemn pillars. There were four or five people besides our little group. I have always suspected they were reporters, for the papers had a full account of it all. Mother may have convened them. She had a full hour at the telephone, after Audely and I 'phoned her that we were engaged and coming back at five to get married. I don't believe, as a matter of fact, though she took our message herself, that she had quite

grasped it. She certainly nearly jumped out of her skin when we walked in, casually assuming she knew all about it. Mother is not so spry as she was; I fear she is breaking up a little. She has still her hair.

Rowley Deane had brought a friend of his on to dinner: a poet, an interesting person whom I shall cultivate. He had reddish hair, brushed up like a faun, with a pointed beard. He stood there, through the ceremony, in the shadows of the aisle and watched us with a heavenly sneer, not a worldly one. Oh, and another person, who just nodded at Audely and sat down in a back pew. Her eyes fell on me as I passed her and seemed to fill me suddenly with a sense of responsibility that I had lacked till then. It stayed with me through the ceremony, and it forced me to think of Audely a little and not so much of the scene. She was all in black—a real, honest war-widow, perhaps, or even the Spanish lady of whom I have always been more jealous than I knew? But her hair was quite grey; she might have been called beautiful, only *dans le temps?* . . . She seemed to know the poet. . . .

Well, we got married all right. *C'était la moindre des choses*, Audely said.

## XXVII

### *From The Lady Arles*

12, BOLSOVER TERRACE,  
HART-LE-POOL.

YES, luckily, Audely's agony was soon over. He was in hospital, though, over three months, so I make out, and he was certainly let out rather too soon; only, we are glad—I cannot tell you how glad—to have him back with us again. He is in a very weak state, I consider, and is marked P.B., whatever that is—"set aside for light duty."

His regiment having been moved here in the meantime, I thought it best to move too: give up the Edwardes Square house and take a little one here, where Audely could be, as it were, billeted on us. I was quite determined to manage it, though Venice wasn't very keen on coming away from London. She hates military society. But I was urgent with her. I told her that her place was with her husband, and that if she didn't see it, then it was his mother-in-law's! I think she was afraid that she would be called upon to nurse him, and she knows she is no good at that.

But it is not a case of that. He says himself that his is a nice cooshy wound that will give him the rest he needed after two years' strenuous labour, but I am afraid it means masterly inactivity for life. He has got a permanent stiff neck, or something wrong there, and all sorts of foreign elements fitted into his leg—half-way up—pieces of imitation or synthetic bone. They do these things so well, nowadays. He can walk all right—or with the very slightest of limps—and that, they tell me, will be better soon, and he has been allowed to take up golf again, and plays as good a game as ever, which pleases him very much.

Venice hates golf and all that appertains to it. That is as it may be, but she must not abnegate *all* her duties as a wife for one reason or another! I told her she really must

put some constraint on herself, and accept some of his frequent invitations to go round with him. She can take an interest and applaud his strokes, and to do that she ought to master some of the technicalities of the game.

She was unexpectedly good about it, but said that if she was to be on the ground at all she had better play. What she couldn't stand was hanging round doing nothing in the cold, with all the beastly blacks from the collieries settling on her face and making her hideous. Ilsa, who is with us just now, suggested that she should get "Bibby," as we call one of the nice subalterns, to give her a few lessons, and she consented—partly because Bibby is devoted to her and she likes his ardent gaze. She didn't get it over golf. Golf is too serious. But he is not a very good teacher, he is so sincere. And for a deprecating learner like Venice, who wants to be told she is getting on all right even if she isn't, quite, just to keep up her spirits, it's hopeless. Poor Bibby puts his head on one side after every stroke she gets off—or doesn't get off—and says sadly :

"I'm afraid, Lady Venice, you'll never make a player!"

He says to me she is too uninterested, too easily put off, to have any sense of the game. She is giving it up in disgust and hardly ever goes out now, so I have asked Bibby to take *me* on. I wouldn't let Audely teach me, though he offered: he would have made me so nervous. So I immolated poor Bibby, who manfully drills the old woman for love of Audely. He agrees with me that until Audely is stronger there ought to be some one near him lest his leg gives suddenly, and he could just clutch at a woman's arm and not feel degraded, as he would if a man went with him on purpose to take care of him. And I am not so bad, now that I have got over the first gawkiness of a beginner, and Audely likes me to go round with him, or says he does. I don't go very often, for fear of his men laughing at his playing golf with his mother-in-law!

I can keep him company better at Bridge. I always did play a fairly decent game. We have parties here, about three times a week. Venice hangs about in lovely tea-gowns which make people think the thing that isn't, alas! and looks over our hands and brings us drinks.

Audely's fellow officers like her; their wives adore her; that's the way of it. It is her title and the unassuming way she wears it. Her modest, simple manners put them

at ease, while the rather indifferent attitude of their men-folk prevents them being jealous of her. Altogether, she is a great success. I used to think she treated everybody too much alike, but one has to march with the times, and her manner is perfect for these ones. I think her association with Percy did a little democratize her, although she used to stand up against him in argument. They used to have violent arguments about travelling third class, which he made her do, as a socialist's wife would have to. She declared that the lower classes, even if they weren't lower, smelt. They do. Percy couldn't deny it. She said she hated people who ate sweets and biscuits and oranges in trains, and had parcels of fish wrapped up in newspaper that bulged. Audely told her that the eating of peppermint-drops was a survival, and that, in the mediaeval times she used to gas about and liked so much, she could not have gone without a pomander—the equivalent of the peppermint-drop—and that Théroigne de Mirécourt, when she led the women to Versailles, riding on a cannon, had a scent-bottle enclosed in the handle of her cane. Percy said he didn't know anything about that, but we ought to realize what a potent weapon of estrangement between the classes the sense of smell had proved in the past, and that one of the uses of money up to now had been the power to set up a barrage between ourselves and assaults on the olfactory nerve.

How long ago all those discussions in the Edwardes Square house seem! Percy is in the Army, now, out in the East, and Audely home, invalided. . . .

He is awfully proud of Venice, I can see. They seem to suit each other to a T. Though they are very quiet, very aloof, the best form, all round, in a married couple I ever saw. Venice would die if he called her "Little Woman" or "The Wife" as I have heard the other officers here do to their spouses, and she would never think of alluding to him as her "boy," or even her "man." They seem to have a strict code of style between themselves, and live up to it. Rather Spitzbergian I call it; but then, I am different—or was.

I think Venice is happy. Ilsa says she is, because she always was. Why should she not be? She doesn't know the agony of fear, of unassuaged desires, like my poor Ilsa, and has never lain awake and heard the clock strike all the hours, as Ilsa does most nights now. That is the curse of



caring. It has come to Ilsa very late, but very practically. Her Archie is in a very unhealthy spot, we know, and sometimes she doesn't hear from him for days! Once it was over a week—ten days. Ilsa never said anything about it, but she chose never to open a single letter from any one else until she heard from Archie. By the time it did come, there was a pile that high which needed answering. And when he did get leave—it was only once in nine months—he wrote one sentence in a letter after he went back that struck me. He said Leave was like a drop of water poured on to a parched throat in Hell. Made him burn worse, I suppose he meant. . . .

Ilsa seems to live in church—you know she has become a *Cartholic*—that is how she pronounces it, and to add "Roman" would offend her mortally. There is a very nice priest here—a Belgian refugee from Termonde—and she finds him a great comfort. I am glad. . . .

It is strange that, of the two sisters, Ilsa has got more misery out of her marriage than Venice, but also, I think, some drops of pure joy that Venice will never have. For, you know, when Archie and she are together, she looks transfigured!

Venice wasn't much distressed while Audely was out in France until she heard he was hurt, and *then* she didn't worry much, since the surgeon wrote it wasn't very bad, and he was being properly looked after. She just went on writing war poetry and slept like a top. She said it was because she had an utter confidence in his star, an inward prescience that he wouldn't be killed, or even wounded seriously. Well, I don't know about that last. . . .

No, it was I who worried about him and wrote every day and kept him supplied with cakes and cigarettes and newspapers and silly creature comforts men like out there. Venice said she knew that it pleased and amused me to fuss about *her* husband, and that I should be jealous if she presumed to write to him more than once a week. I didn't tell her that I wrote every day, lest it kept her from writing at all! She might have taken it that way? And Audely would have missed her weekly letter more than all mine put together! And when he came back she greeted him as if he'd been away for the week-end. He said he liked it. Perhaps he did. He remarked that it was quite in the

picture, and that people must be allowed to proceed along their own lines.

It was the first time they had met since the wedding!

I suppose you have never been properly told about it, have you? Certainly not by me. It was indeed such maimed rites, as they say in Shakespeare. I confess I did not think that the picturesqueness of it, which Venice bravely insisted on, justified the end. After all the fuss and preparation there had been for the event, when it came, to have her turned off like that! I hated it. The church so badly lit; no wedding gown or veil; no red baize; no triumphal arch; no promenade up the central aisle on her father's arm! She couldn't have that, of course—that was my fault; my conduct about Anatole weighs on me even now—but she could at least have had her uncle, the Duke of Norssex, and ought to have had. It turns out now that Henry was quite *au fait* of the Gregson entanglement, and would have been much more savage and actively annoyed—cutting off her allowance—if he hadn't been convinced that it would never come off. He felt sure that the moment there came to be any real approach to intimacy between them, the girl's natural feelings of decency would revolt. I strive to put it politely, but Henry never minces his words. He was sure the moment the fellow attempted familiarities, she would kick him to Hell—or send him to the Devil! I forget which he said. Of course Minna was at him to withhold money, but he refused, saying that it would be hard on me, as they would be sure to come down on me for everything if he did, and I was too fond of the child to refuse and keep my money for my own use. . . .

Henry did not behave so very badly, you see. But I impressed upon him, in Percy's interest when he was a little calmer, that Percy was not personally revolting; far from it. He always had a bath every day—sometimes two—as I knew, of knowledge, and kept his hands cleaner even than Venice, whom I often had to scold when she belonged to me, for things like that. She often needed the help of a little pumice-stone. No, I don't think that was the reason of the breaking off of the engagement; I have never quite fathomed it.

Percy said, when I saw him later on, that the break came from her, absolutely, for that he loved her still. He took it that she had suddenly discovered that she did not

care for him enough to marry him, and loyally telling him so begged him to give her back her troth. In all that he behaved exactly like one of us, although I couldn't get Henry to admit that that was within the bounds of possibility.

I firmly believed that if Audely had not appeared suddenly, invested with all the glamour of Last Leave, she would have gone through with the Percy business. But you remember that letter—I sent you a type-written copy of it—that letter proved that she had had some sort of love relation with Audely. Though, you know, Ilsa firmly believes that Venice wrote the letter herself to force me to let her do some silly little thing I had forbidden her. I cannot think my rule over the child was so iron that she needed to resort to a subterfuge like that, involving, too, a man who at that time was more my friend than hers.

Of course young girls at that age do minxish things, and she knew Audely was away, and if he came back was safe not to talk. He never does discuss things that matter, but leaves them mostly to settle themselves, as they do. . . .

No, I believe he wrote that letter. It is of a piece with his character, the way he settled down to forego my Venice because of the Spanish embroglio to which he alluded in the letter, and which we now know for certain existed. *She* was at the wedding, though she made no scene, just to see the last of Audely. I heard it all from Rowley Deane, who nosed it out for me. She is the wife of a Spanish grandee, and Audely knew it was no good, that she would stick to her social position and advantages, or would give him a great deal of trouble to break down her resistance.

Audely always reminds me of Prometheus on his rock. He would lie there and let the vulture tear away merrily at his vitals, sooner than reach out his arm for a knife to cut away his bonds—and hers, perhaps, poor thing! She may have wanted to be divorced?

That is all so long ago now, but I have always felt I was wrong to leave an important matter like that for ever hanging in the air, and, trying to put it delicately, I asked Audely, after he had been home about a month, if he had thought of Venice at all before the war?

He answered, Yes, certainly; he had always thought her a thundering nice little kid—Audely *will* talk like the Tommies now, it is so funny!

I retorted, Yes; but the attraction of a child and of a grown-up woman were very different. He asked me when exactly did Venice change from one to the other?—did she ever change at all? And I said I supposed he meant by that, that she *had* been a grown-up child and *was* a babyish woman. He said, "Something like that"; and I answered: But wasn't that her charm? And he agreed.

After a pause I asked him to tell me, just for fun, since he *had* married her, and presumably loved her in the usual way, when it was he did first begin to find her attractive as a woman? I said he owed me an answer. He agreed, and said it must have been once when he had come back from Odessa, straight on to Beardmore, and found her behaving like a faun to put off an American millionaire you had sent on to us with a letter of introduction. I remember. She was eating ripe figs and squashing them against her mouth, so that the juice ran down her cheeks. That was the way she generally ate figs or bananas—it wasn't of malice pre-pense. And Cyrus P. wasn't there then; it was Rowley Deane, no millionaire. But it is just like Audely to think so and love her for it.

I was no forrader with my perquisitions. One never is with the dear man.

I tried another tack. I told him that right up to the date of the war, Venice had been such a babe that I had considered it a duty to *surveiller* her correspondence. He raised his eyebrows a little, to mark disapproval of my method. I boldly risked his condemnation, and went on to tell him that, once, looking over the child's papers, I had come across a letter from Count le Löffel—did he remember him at Nauheim, six months before the war?

"Oh, yes," Audely said cheerfully. "He's killed. I killed him. It was he who gave me this nasty cut on my shoulder."

As if any one knows who does what in a *mêlée*! I continued, laughing; but I *was* nervous, Laura:

"I had quite a good bag that day up at Lochroyan—or was it in Park Crescent? I actually found two love letters the poor child had left about. . . . Le Löffel's was one. I won't tell you who wrote the other. . . ."

I stopped. I hung upon his next words.

"I can guess," he said wearily, and got up to go out.

I have seldom been so angry with Audely, for I realized

then that the subject was closed, and that the letter would remain a sealed book to me for ever. I know as well as I sit here that I shall never dare put that question again to Audely or Venice either. I dare not.

And here we are at the last—the war going on full-tilt, as if it would never stop for momentum, and so far bringing nothing but prosperity to the masses. There is less misery now than at any time before the war. I suppose one ought to feel glad that there are no more half-starved children going about. And so I am, but it rather enrages me, these people flattering themselves that it is not so much We, who set it going with our blood—Audely will never be the same man again, Archie has lost an arm, and Bertie Corfe died of dysentery—as they who are keeping it going with their work. And don't they take it out of Us in insolence! A title is worth nothing at all there, as I find to my cost. The Countess at the counter, Audely calls me when I go out with my string bag and stand in a queue with the rest, for a bit of fish or a half-pound of butter.

And yet, after all, we four—Venice, Audely, Ilsa, and I—are a pure bit of the veritable aristocracy of England, stuck—like the bullets I have heard of, in the fleshy part of a man's leg that he doesn't feel a bit!—into the solid mass of the people, who don't bother about us any more than the soldier does about his nicely encysted piece of lead. He eats just the same, and don't *these* the people eat? In one of those shops full of rude people—on both sides of the counter—I stood beside a coal man as black as a sweep, and heard him ask the price of a salmon, which ought to have staggered him as it staggered me. I could not have offered it to myself, as the French say. Not a bit; he took the whole, at five shillings a pound. He would have it for his dinner, he said.

And when one has secured a few things at the risk of one's life and soiling one's sleeves over the dirty marble counter, they refuse to send them for you, and you have to toil home with them; or, if they do condescend some time later in the day, the little horrid errand boy insists on leaving the beef or the fish or the milk at the front, and cheeks you if you ask him politely to go round to the proper door at the back. That no one ever uses except Audely and Venice: for Audely it is a short cut to his messroom. The gorgeous

slavery I am supposed to control never thinks of using it, and I sometimes have to go out of my way not to meet her dressed up to the nines, going out to have tea with her friends when she thinks she has done enough to the house and put a bit of meat between two plates in the oven to stew itself away. Oh for Anatole, the spy! She wears silk stockings, and doesn't trouble to steal mine, which are of Lisle thread. When I was a girl I had two pairs of silk, darned and darned again. Poor Venice hasn't had a new dress on for a month. It rubs it in to see, as we do, when we go out, proud Munition mothers, wives of coal-trimmers—the best-paid trade in the works—wheeling a baby in a smart silk-lined perambulator with a couple of small toddlers running at the side, dressed in pink satin pelisses, sitting down now and then, as small children will, in the middle of the dirty pavement that is like one long spittoon! The mother doesn't care; *she* doesn't object to matter in the wrong place; and if she did, she would soon get new pink pelisses run up. They'll go home to tea, and eat the salmon that "Father" bought, on a table without a cloth, and the children won't have bibs on, and the butter will be scooped out of the paper it was brought home in, if any. I saw a pound of butter without any paper at all dropped in the street the other day, and the wretched child who was carrying it picked it up and gave it a rub with her filthy apron! I hoped it wasn't my butter; but I couldn't be sure. One never is sure. What one is sure of is that these people, and others like them, will be perfectly pleased with their dirty butter and their children and themselves. They are It now!

I was complaining about it to Audely—I didn't tell him about the butter, but the pink pelisses and the salmon. He said that these facts ought to console me, that the end is not yet, the nice old arrangements will probably last my time. But, he declares, and I believe him, when once the masses begin to look to the outside of the platter; when the sort of education we are giving them to-day opens their eyes and they refuse to eat salmon in squalor, but insist on a tablecloth; when butter is not eaten out of the paper it was bought in, but neatly made into pats; when the children have bibs to prevent them wiping their mouths on their pink pelisses—then, he says, then I may begin to tremble! For then every one without exception will be a great deal bigger

than their old boots, the world will not be large enough to contain the ambitions and aspirations of the hitherto hide-bound populations. There may be wheat enough, but there certainly will not be enough culture to go round!

Well, there: *La Garde Meurt*. . . .

And any way, you've come in. We are shoulder to shoulder against the powers of darkness.

It's nice, now, to be able to blame nobody but the people who have wrought this woe.

Sometimes, when I go out with Audely, and get rather tired after I have done eight holes with him, I sit down on the sandhills half way while he finishes the rest of the round, and think of what one must think of, nothing else. I think of the damping down of our excessive hopes, and the entire suppression of the note of joy that has made Life such a grey thing. . . .

This is a queer, ugly place, nearly as dull and dour as Scotland. I never thought I should come to end my days here. . . . I may; I have serious thoughts of Sir Bullace Schack's house on the Links: it is nice and near for Audely's golf. It is conveniently built, and is the only thing approximating to a gentleman's house in the place. And now that we have no home and a diminished income, we might settle down here, at any rate till after the war, which may go on for thirty years more, and would not surprise me if it did. It all depends on Audely's wishes, and Venice's. But she sings very small nowadays. I never knew a girl so altered or thought she could contrive to look forlorn with so much dignity.

I can see a very wide view here as I sit—the yellow sands of Durham that persist in spite of so much blackness, and the white line of surf that shows the great curve of the bay. The German ships, not so long ago, rode, out to the right, at Saltergate Nab and bombarded poor Hart-le-Pool. There are machine-gun emplacements all about, that do to shelter against if there comes a shower, and keep the wind off us. Some day they will do better work than keeping civilians dry and warm. . . .

Looking inland I can see the dull green of the links blocked at the north end by the beginnings of the vast plot of works, after which there is no more green, even

of this parched and muddy sort. All is industry. The factories have all their tall spiky chimneys, terminated at the point with fat blobs of grey smoke that looks solid, and streels out to sea in a long, faint trail. Sometimes when "they are practising"—the phrase one hears oftenest—we think that, taken in conjunction with these puffs of smoke, a naval engagement may be going on; I even have seen Audely's orderly quite taken in, and running to a point on the sands to see better, and collecting a little crowd of mothers and babies—for this is a seaside health resort for all the huddled populations, the nearest breathing place in Yorkshire and Durham, and we have come to share it with them. . . . Imagine our coming here for health in the old days! Why, the north wind brings up all the noxious gases imaginable from the Munition Works, and our food always seems to taste of copper and verdigris and our mouths are full of grit and our faces dirty the moment we put them out of the front door. It isn't wholesome for us. But then, Venice reminds me, it isn't wholesome for them—the people who are working actually in it and the soldiers who must be here and breathe it in all day long. We are only the camp followers, she says, and must not complain. . . .

Poor child, when she knows I am sitting out here she often puts on her hat and drifts along this way and sits down beside me without speaking—at first. . . . By and by she unbends a little and tells me things—about the war—little pathetic ideas she has. . . . She always had lots of ideas, Venice!

She sits oddly, her knees drawn up to her chin like a fish wife looking down at her ugly sensible shoes she wears now, to please Audely, and her white dress that is not very white—everything here is dirty as soon as you put it on, with the smoke from the great kitchens where we are cooking, night and day, death for millions of enemies, or so we hope. Venice isn't socialist now or Pacifist; she isn't anything, she says, except the quiet resigned wife of a man in the army—she who wanted once to be a power in Art and Letters, a social arbitress, a Queen of Courts of Love. She says sometimes, bitterly, her chin on her knees, so that her voice sounds muffled and old:

"Love, who thinks of Love? We have just to beat the Hun first, and then lie down and die of weariness—this lot of us, anyhow."



Then :

“Poetry ! Don't let us talk of it. There isn't any atmosphere for poetry now—not my sort, at all events. . . . Books ! They have to be handbooks to the trenches, popular sermons on the truths by which we—die, these days !”

She daren't talk like this to Audely, he would whop her. He simply won't have grouching. And she tries to please Audely. I fancy she loves him now, very much as any other wife loves her husband. Sentimentalizes over real things ; she always did. She said the other day that she and he were like two souls wandering along that golf course—in Hades, in the half-light of day that fades all the sooner here because the sky is so darkened—hand in hand, their eyes bent, not on each other, but on the smoke-stacks, the group of ironwork in front, the ultimate joyless goal. “And when we've attained it, it is but killing, at the best ? *Le beau geste*, eh ? Spitting Germans on bayonets, *en attendant* the pitchforks of Hell !”

This doesn't mean in the least that she is a Pacifist, Laura, only that she thinks it hard that valour should have come to consist in superiority in methods of butchery.

That's morbid, of course, but the poor child's mentality, it has been explained to me, has been completely altered by this new orientation—though what the Orient has to do with us, and Venice in particular ? I dare say, as Audely says, a form of selfish apprehension plays some part in her depression. What sort of a world is this for her to live in now, and after ? She is only twenty-eight. Audely sometimes says kindly, “My poor Venice, if you could only realize that this is a thing so immeasurably bigger than the accidents of our individual destiny !” But Venice will never learn, I fear, to put her destiny into the common stock, which is, I suppose, what Audely means.

He himself is much altered. I suppose it had to be. It is the toll that England has exacted of her sons, all and sundry, grave and gay, clever or stupid. But it is the toll England has taken of their bodies which affects, and always will affect, us women most. Venice feels it ; not so much as me, perhaps. . . . I miss his conversation—and his helpfulness of mind more than of body. . . . He has changed his objectives, that's it ; we used to be them. And he got Venice, on the strength of it. Now he is not much good to her.

His Colonel says that he is the most helpful officer—barring his invalidedness—that he has, next to—and here comes the rub—an unspeakable little cad called Gorbudoc Evans, who was once a draper's assistant in Chester and is now assistant-adjutant.

I will tell you all about it, Laura, as I gather it bit by bit from a ridiculously reticent Audely. That means he resents it. I must say I do resent it too.

For you would have said that blood would tell, wouldn't you? if anywhere, in what should be our own aristocratic preserves, or always have been—Head-quarters of a Special Reserve Regiment. See, I've got their jargon! . . . Well, it seems to me blood tells upwards—as far as the second place. But the first place is that disreputable old cache, as Venice calls it, full of dusty papers, files, and plans (Audely took me in once—rather smuggled me—in my old dark wrap cloak and “hushed” me when I spoke above a whisper, as if I had been a lady of questionable position invading a hive of bachelors!). And the draper's assistant seems to reign there. It is annoying and humiliating, rather, that Blue Blood should have come second to a Gorbudoc Evans. No manners—I was introduced to him once. Audely has manners and manner. Perhaps it is his manner that does it. For Audely's colonel doesn't trust him *jusqu' au bout*. I could see. How? I'll tell you. One evening, when the Colonel was with us for Auction and Mr. Gorbudoc Evans came in.

I noticed that when it came to the discussion of some form to be signed—Audely said it was an A.F.W. 3634—Mr. Evans said A.F.W. 48A, and the Colonel just took *his* number for granted. I understand that it turned out afterwards that Audely's was the right figure, but that didn't change the Colonel's attitude much.

That is, of course, the paper side of the Army; Audely's note is the regimentally decorative note, his wife says rather bitterly. What does she want? They put him up to make speeches after concerts, and smarten up companies that have got slack, and soothe restive drafts. . . . And she is peevish, because apparently they won't give him a place in the Orderly Room. Though I cannot believe he is any good at making a return of the amount of jam consumed by a given company in a given time. . . .

She says *she* is annoyed because it grieves *him*. She

hates his caring. It is not his vocation, obviously; and how should it be? So he might be glad to be let off that sort of thing. But he is always thinking about it and these sordid figures and numbers.

Yesterday, after he had sat for a solid twenty minutes after dinner, she asked him, just to *taquiner* him, I fear, for she knew quite well, what he was thinking about. And he answered, equally to tease her, for he no longer bothers to respect her little moods—he is too weary of things in general to be *aux petit soins* with his own wife—he answered, and these are his exact words:

“I was wondering how the officer commanding A Coy. could show fourteen pounds ten shillings worth of surplus braces in his pay-and mess-book?”

Poor Venice took her answer, and subsided—she hasn't got the go now even to exclaim, but I did. I said:

“Good Heavens, Audely, how can you sit and moon over such a thing as that, you who used to be——”

Venice cut in with a little of her old spirit:

“An articulate human being.”

“Call me an agreeable rattle at once!” he said, stretching himself and looking at her with puzzled, pained eyes of no interest—that is what hurts her. . . .

“Well, what is there to think about? The O.C.A.Coy. asked me to fix it for him. He's eight pounds eleven down on right and left pouches, and four pound ten upon braces!”

Venice had left the room. She had no expression at all—her armour. I sighed, and he said—deprecating a little, perhaps?—

“Oh, well, we don't know where we stand till we've finished with it.”

And I was thinking of this that had happened last evening as I sat on the hill-side and fingered bits of bent grass that slid through my fingers. I take work out, but I can't get on with it much out of doors.

Where we stand! We—We, who have got the blood and the manners and who have done the service. For we have, though the others have too, and they will it seems, on the strength of that, climb over our heads to the first places. I dare say people will still think we are still in the first place—we shall be round the throne all looking as nice as we can,

though not really supporting it, when the war is over and they don't want our sons any more, bless them! We shall still be loyal, although we know that the business part of it—like the paper-work Gorboduc Evans does better than Audely—will be in their hands. Perhaps it always has? One thinks of Percy Gregson and his undeniable efficiency at governing and directing. He is doing what we are all doing now. He has got a medal. He is a captain. And one remembers that James Molendinar, whom one was glad enough to have about in the old days, was the son of a self-made man and got in to the Political Orderly Room, *i.e.* to the working of the machine, through his great administrative talents. We liked him because we liked him, and quite forgot that he was not one of us. We were in front of the Throne—he was behind it! The Power. . . .

I suppose it has always been like that, only the war has brought it out. And even that very night Audely and Venice were friends again, in their funny, quiet way, and Audely was saying half apologetically, "What *was* a fellow to be interested in except right and left pouches?" She didn't say *Her*, but I thought it. He went on amplifying, vaguely grouching at things in general, and she seconded him, until I nearly cried of despair. There was nothing left that was real—no feudalism, no Europe even to have either Feudalism or Democracy in. And the lessons of history, pooh! not a single relevant example that will compare with what is going on now. . . .

"And no knowing," I added in their vein, "if one will have any income, or be expected to eat grass, as somebody or other said the People ought." . . .

And Venice came in mirthlessly with:

"Only a world covered—covered with Orderly Rooms where men are filling in A.F.W. 3634A's for dear life!"

Poor sick Audely got disgusted with us and went out! . . .

I was thinking this day as I sat, trying to piece it all out, wondering when the change that is now all over him began? I believe it was during that awful week-end in September, until the Germans first turned and ran.

I can feel with him there; it was ghastly: like waiting by a death bed. . . .

Audely had been sent for down to Hayward's Heath, at James Molendinar's bungalow, where he had two or three

of the Ministers down for golf. They wanted information from Audely about railways in the Sandjak of Novibazar. And after their conversation—it was on a Thursday afternoon—they went into the garden, in the beautiful still weather, and by way of a *relâche* the poor dears were all discussing whether God was trying to be good to His creatures, letting the sun shine on them as they died. . . .

And just then a maid came and told one of them that he was wanted on the 'phone. . . . He came back crying.

“Every officer of the Second Coldstreams wiped out!” he managed to tell them presently. “Dead! Every officer but one of the forty-second, and all but two of the sixty-ninth.” . . .

Audely says the three of them stood in front of him like dumb wooden blocks. . . .

And I say, if it could matter like that to those three—for they were, after all, only the Gorbudoc Evans' and draper's assistant-adjutants of the State—what do you suppose it meant to him, to me, to you, to Us? Just as if the whole side wall of a house had fallen out! . . .

My dear, when one came to think it over, there wasn't a man child left that you and Ilsa used to play in the gardens with at Ambassador's Gate. . . . Audely hadn't a man left standing whom he could call cousin or even nephew! . . . Not, at least, a whole man and on his feet. . . .

Of course one knows the oldish men are left, and there are young boys coming on. But so few, so few! And they are all, as it were, branded for the slaughter-house! Audely says that when drafts go out—when he sees them off, he thinks of sheep with that red-brown mark on their hocks. . . . And these are men—men he loves. . . . For, you know, he does love his men and they love him. . . .

So when I look at Venice, all this is in my look—the mother-look, which honestly I believe she is at last beginning to appreciate. She is beginning to crave for love, for demonstrations of it from anybody that will give them. And like all people who have pushed love away, and waited to welcome it till they felt the need of it, as she has done, she is a little inclined to complain of coldness.

Audely *is* cold to her, but not colder than she has been to him. Now that she is pining for a little tenderness she cannot put forth the tendrils, the little feelers that would invite it and provoke it in him.

They can neither of them help it. She knows that. She knows what he has to bear. He has been violently shoved out of the game he loved so to play. The very fibres and springs of his existence are left ragged and jagged. He had put all the soul of his life into this, and his soul has been knocked out! . . .

Venice says softly, without unkindness—she is incapable of being unkind to any one—that he is still Undine, for the new soul he had got through excitement, his war soul, died in his body when he came back here to the dreary prose of war.

Venice will never be any man's soul, she knows.

And the dark gets darker, and Venice's white frock looks greyer than ever, and flutters across her thin legs that show through the stocking. She won't wear thick ones. Her hat ceases to worry her by attempting to blow off; the wind always dies down here in the evenings. She loses that little set look of endurance she always has out of doors from one thing or another—chiefly wind, which she hates. And Audely is seen over the hill, coming nearer and nearer, and we both get up and wave. . . . And he finishes his game with a sedulous putt and comes to pick us up and take us home to supper. Perhaps it is very late—about a quarter to eight—and he has kept us sitting there in the cold, and he is only rather sorry. He is still the old Audely who makes times and seasons, meals and women, all wait on him. Luckily, neither of his women cares a bit what they eat, or if it is cold or overdone or what not, so long as he is happy. It is all we can do for him, who has done so much for us.

Yes; Audely tried to give his whole life. God has not accepted it all; but He has taken a good piece of it.

Sometimes I go up to my room and open the box where I keep my precious documents, and among others Audely's Commission, which he has given over to me to hold for him. I pore over it, yet I know every word it contains. . . .

“GEORGE, by the grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King . . . Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India. . . .”

remember nearly every word of it, as if it were the sampler I worked when I was a child.

“To our trusty and well beloved James Audely Mildmay Bar, Greeting.” And then it goes on about the special trust and confidence he reposes in him, till the end:

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THE END

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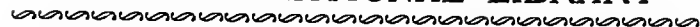
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